

cigar aficionado

A portrait of actor Joe Manganiello, who is the central figure on the magazine cover. He is wearing a dark grey suit, a white shirt, and a dark patterned tie. He has a short beard and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He is holding a cigar in his right hand, which also features a black ring on the ring finger and a silver watch on the wrist. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

THE GOOD LIFE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

www.cigaraficionado.com

GOING FOR GREEN—
WHO WILL WIN THE
MASTERS?

80
CIGARS
RATED

12 FASTEST
CARS
MONEY
CAN BUY

WILD FOR IRISH
WHISKEY

**WINNING
BIG**
WITH SMALL
CASINO GAMES

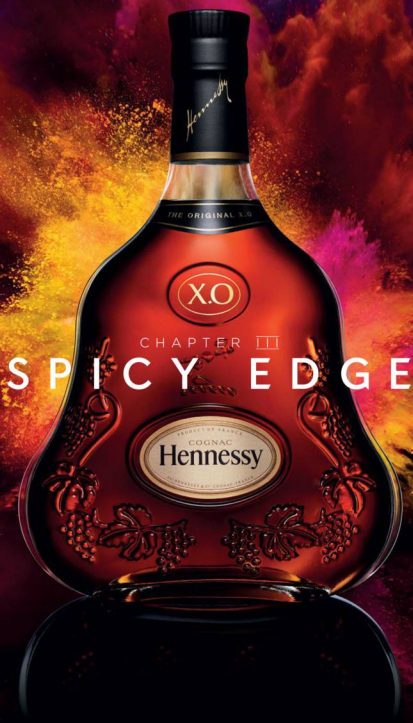
**JOE
MANGANIELLO**
RISING STAR

Hennessy X.O

EACH DROP
OF HENNESSY X.O
IS AN ODYSSEY

DON'T WAIT TO EXPERIENCE GREATNESS





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SWEET NOTES



RISING



CHAPTER II
HEAT



CHAPTER II
SPICY EDGE

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19 T 64



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For decades, Padrón smokers have shared with us the stories of special moments in their lives that have been distinguished by smoking one of our cigars. Striving to create great cigars worthy of such special times is our singular motivation, those moments shared with family and friends. The Padrón Family thanks you for your continued loyalty and trust in the Padrón name.

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march/april 2018

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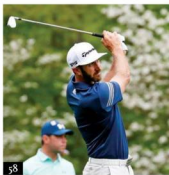
At six-foot-five and hard as a rock, Joe Manganiello may seem built to play tough guys, but he also has an artistic side and a comedic flair as well as a love of great cigars.

golf 58 HANDICAPPING THE MASTERS

Augusta's azaleas and heritage are great, but the players go to win the Master's green jacket. We rate the top 10 best prospects. Plus, a look at the tournament's historical greats.

cars 70 HYPER CHARGED

The ranks of street-legal hypercars are swelling with rides that boast sleek physiques and promise speeds well in excess of 200 miles per hour. And it's no hype.



ON THE COVER

Joe Manganiello: the hard guy with a lot of heart. Photographed for CIGAR Aficionado by Peter Yang.

DOMINICAN

BY BIRTH

CUBAN

BY HERITAGE



SURGEON GENERAL WARNING: Tobacco Smoke Increases The Risk Of Lung Cancer And Heart Disease, Even In Nonsmokers.

Rafael Nodal, boutique cigar crafter and Head of Product Capability at Tabacalera USA, has created this cigar using the best Dominican-Cuban seeds, grown in the world-renowned Cibao Valley of the Dominican Republic.

Nodal has reimaged the Cuban soul of Trinidad, and the result, a Dominican puro full of character, complex flavor and unique aromas.

gambling **80** **THE SMALL-GAME ARTIST**
Eddie Teams makes a living playing oddball casino games that other pros wouldn't touch—and proves they're not all sucker bets.

spirits **87** **THE TOP O' THE IRISH**
The venerable whiskey from the Old Sod is widening its horizons with a range of single malts, single pot stills and grain whiskey to match Ireland's reputation for blends.

travel **90** **A PRINCELY PLACE**
Monaco may be among the world's smallest countries, but the Mediterranean principality packs a wallop with great food, diversions, scenery and millionaires.

cigars

tasting **100** We rate 80 cigars in six sizes: Churchills (100), coronas (102), coronas gordas (104), figurados (106), miscellaneous (108) and robustos (110) plus the Buying Guide (112) and Connoisseur's Corner, our vintage cigar tasting (115).

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We sliced and diced the stats to tell you what were the highest-rated cigars of 2017, and how they ranked by origin, size and cost.

cuba report **125** **RATING HABANOS**
Our intrepid man in Havana finagles a place at the table where Cuba blind tastes its latest blends. We dare you to read it without being envious.

128 **MOMENTS TO REMEMBER**
Photos from our readers as they enjoy themselves and their cigars.

136 **MADE FOR YOU**
Furniture made from plane parts; a luxury pen for the digital age; World Cup caliber soccer cleats; an umbrella that can't get lost; the get-buff massage; and denims that are fitting for large men.



highlights

Searching for a great new cigar? Then this tasting is for you. Our tasting panel tested 80 smokes in a wide range of categories, from stately Churchills to deviant miscellaneous smokes. Thirty-nine scored 90 points or higher, so there's an opportunity to find a hidden treasure the next time you visit your local brick-and-mortar shop.



**TOP CHURCHILL
PUNCH AFTER DINNER**

This value-priced smoke uses tobaccos from five different countries in its blend, including an alluringly dark wrapper from Ecuador.

HONDURAS

93



**TOP FIGURADO
ALEC BRADLEY BLACK MARKET ESTELÍ TORPEDO**

An extension of the original Black Market from Honduras, the Esteli iteration is rolled in Nicaragua using mostly Nicaraguan tobaccos.

NICARAGUA

93



**TOP MISCELLANEOUS
LAST CALL BY A.J. FERNANDEZ CHIQUITAS**

Originally cigarmaker A.J. Fernandez's personal blend, Last Call wears a reddish Ecuador Habano wrapper over Nicaraguan binder and filler from Fernandez's own farms.

NICARAGUA

93



**TOP CORONA
ROMEO Y JULIETA 1875 CEDRO DELUXE NO. 2**

Rolled mostly with Dominican tobaccos and enrobed in an attractive Indonesian cover leaf, each Cedro Deluxe rests in a lovely, aromatic cedar sleeve.

DOM. REP.

92



**TOP CORONA GORDA
ASHTON VIRGIN SUN CROWN ROBUSTO**

This classic Ashton tied with Cuba's H. Upmann Magnum 46 (Tubo) and the Joya de Nicaragua Antaño 1970 Gran Reserva Robusto Grande for top honors among corona gordas.

DOM. REP.

92



**TOP ROBUSTO
LA AURORA ADN DOMINICANO ROBUSTO**

The ADN Dominican Robusto tied with five other smokes atop the robusto category: Cain Daytona 550, Guardian of the Farm Rambo, La Alianza Natural Robusto Selecto, San Lotano Requiem Maduro Robusto and Viaje Exclusivo Nicaragua Robusto.

DOM. REP.

90



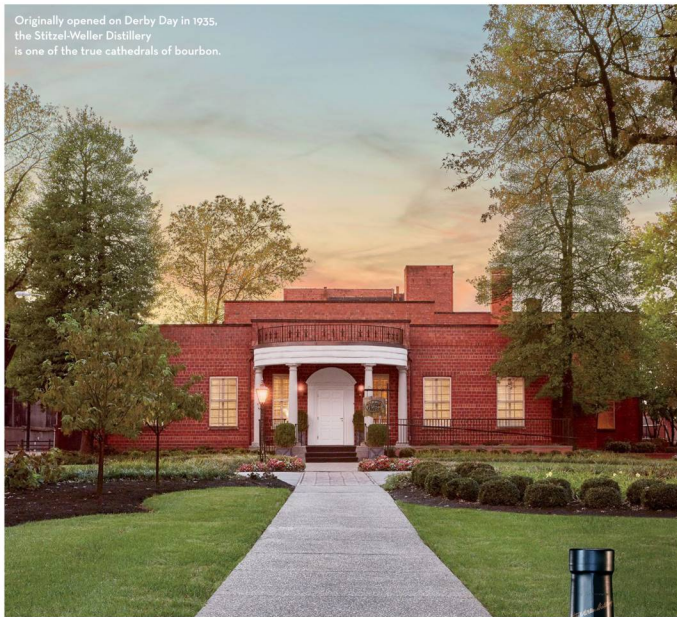
**BEST BUY
CAIN DAYTONA 550**

The value-priced Cain Daytona 550, which is made by the Oliva cigar family, retails for a mere \$6.10 before taxes, making it one of the top values in this issue.

NICARAGUA

90

Originally opened on Derby Day in 1935,
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and rarest remaining stocks to be distilled here at the legendary Stitzel-Weller Distillery.

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A New Look At Our Cigar Reviews

We've rated cigars for more than 25 years, and those reviews have looked virtually the same for that entire time. Not any more.

We are proud to present our new and improved tasting section. We've added a strength field to our tastings, so now every cigar rating not only indicates dimensions, price, blend, country of origin and score, but also the power of its body. There are five categories of strength: mild, mild to medium, medium, medium to full and full bodied.

We made the change to provide ratings that go beyond the score. If you smoke only easygoing cigars, an 89-point, mild cigar is probably a better fit for you than a peppery, full-bodied smoke that scores 94 points.

In addition to that change, we've replaced our magazine's tasting index with a more richly detailed cigar Buying Guide. There you'll find the top-scoring cigars of the issue—regardless of country of origin—plus standout cigars grouped by power, as well as a list of the issue's best buys. We don't know anyone who doesn't like to find a great buy in the cigar world, and if there's one thing our taste tests have proven over the years it is that spending more on a cigar doesn't guarantee you a better product. We want you to find the best cigars—and you'll see that the best cigars aren't always the most expensive cigars.

We're sure you'll find this Buying Guide a handy source of information on your next shopping trip. You'll find it on page 112.

Our Connoisseur's Corner page, where we rate well-aged, collectible cigars, has a new look as well. You'll find that on page 115.

Yes, we've made some changes, but we haven't changed our method of reviewing cigars. Our tasting coordinator shops at retail to buy the cigars we rate. (Yes, it's expensive, but it guarantees that the cigars we rate are like the cigars you buy, not cherry-picked submissions.) He then gives them a code and replaces any brand labels with generic, numbered bands. The two of us and the rest of our tasting panel smoke the cigars blind, which means we don't know the brand name, price, country of origin or any other detail about the cigar.

That's the only way to legitimately rate a cigar. It's the only way we've ever done it, and the only way we will ever do it. While some things may change, that's one thing that we'll never change here at CIGAR AFICIONADO magazine.

MARVIN R. SHANKEN
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

DAVID SAVONA
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



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DNA

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BRAND AMBASSADOR

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Dear Marvin,

I just finished reading your Editors' Note entitled "Shame on Apple" [February 2018]. As a subscriber, I was shocked to see that Apple had banned your Where to Smoke app from the Apple Store.

I too was surprised to learn that if one performs a search on the App Store on the word "cigar" at least eight apps that promote the use of tobacco are available for download on the iPad, and at least five for the iPhone. I was even more surprised by the number of apps that promote the use of cannabis products. The last time I checked, the use of cannabis is illegal at the federal level. As you pointed out in your Editors' Note, cigars are legal on both the state and federal level.

It is a shame that you were unsuccessful in applying reason in your dispute with Apple.

Apple's hypocrisy apparently knows no bounds. When you are the third-largest company in the United States, it appears that you get to write your own rules.

David Frances
Albany, Oregon

Dear Marvin,

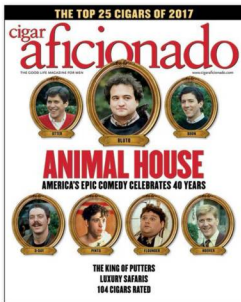
As prior correspondence of mine in years past is evidence, I have been a reader of CIGAR AFICIONADO since its first edition. Although I must add, I really do feel that you have relegated covering cigars and elegant menswear and accessories to a publication about golfing and gambling, evidenced by your relegating the word "cigar" to much smaller print in your publication's banner.

Nevertheless, with that said, I am absolutely outraged that Apple would remove your very useful Where to Smoke app!

I am not, nor shall I ever be, an Apple customer as a result thereof and, moreover, I shall make this known to my friends and colleagues.

I guess that Apple forgot that one can easily access where to drink a beer, where to sip a Scotch and where to find an escort.

Robert L. Geltzer
New York, New York



"Your cover story on one of film's classic comedies, *Animal House*, had me laughing from the first paragraph."
—Stephen W. Starnes Sr., Philadelphia

Dear Marvin,

Your cover story on one of film's classic comedies, *National Lampoon's Animal House* ["The House That Roared," February 2018] had me laughing from the first paragraph. Not only is the movie worth our laughter, but it also opened the door for the multitude of great comedies. It pleases all those who cherish the memories of when and where we were when we first laughed at Otter's suave antics, Boon and Katie's collegiate romance, and Brother Blutarsky's classic counsel to pledge Flounder: "my advice to you is to start drinking heavily."

However, I need to point out one factual error in the article: incorrectly referencing Chris Miller's fraternity at Dartmouth. Chris is a member of the Alpha Delta Phi

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E-MAIL letters@cigaraficionado.com • **LETTERS** 825 8th Ave., 33rd floor, New York, NY 10019 • **EDITORS' BLOGS** Find out what the editors of CIGAR AFICIONADO are thinking—and smoking—in our editors' blogs. David Savona, Gordon Mott, Jack Bettridge, Gregory Mottola and Andrew Nagy want to hear from you. The conversation is taking place on cigaraficionado.com.

cigar aficionado

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Fraternity, not Alpha Delta Chi. AD Chi is actually a sorority founded at UCLA in 1925. Alpha Delta Phi, Chris's and my fraternity, was founded by 19th century philosopher Samuel Eells in 1832 at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York.

As an alumnus and emeritus president of the Alpha Delta Phi International, I wanted to correct the error and commend you for the celebratory article. Brother Miller is one of many in our fraternity's history whose post-college career exemplifies Alpha Delta Phi's longstanding literary heritage. *Stephen W. Starnes Sr.*
President Emeritus
The Alpha Delta Phi International
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Dear Marvin,
Your editorial sickened me. It put the final touch on wanting to rid myself of Apple and go to Android, which I did yesterday. Apple has brainwashed Americans for years to actually even have idiots sleeping outside stores just to be the first ones to buy the newest version. Apple was smart enough to manufacture every version, every size, every color, etc. and idiot Americans fell for it all. On top of that, they've had the most security issues over the past two years than ever before.

Not this guy. I'm done with Apple, and so should every cigar smoker out there.
Tony Cavalli
Trumbull, Connecticut

Dear Marvin,
Thank you for producing one of the only magazines that I look forward to. I was disappointed to hear that Apple blocked the Where To Smoke app. The glaring hypocrisy concerning the availability of marijuana apps is frustrating, but California is Apple's homeland, so I can't really feign disbelief.

However, there is a workaround: on your Apple device, in Safari, go to wts.cigaraficionado.com. Once there, this can be saved to your home screen, creating a direct link. It even has a default icon of your "cigar guy."
Sean Laurie
Santa Rosa, California

Dear Marvin,
I could not agree more with your editorial in the last CIGAR AFICIONADO ["Shame on Apple."] Apple's decision, if it cannot be classified as ridiculous, is at least contradictory with its equal rights concepts. A company that supports race equality, freedom of sexual preferences and the use of spirits and drugs like marijuana is being hypocritical at the minimum.

The argument that smoking damages health is unacceptable in Apple's case, and certainly reflects

Rocky  Patel

Elevate Your Smoke.

Hand Crafted in Esteli, Nicaragua



the personal preferences of Mr. Cook. Perhaps he should be spending his time rethinking the company that he runs, since it is already behind many others that have not only caught up to Apple but are also leading the market.

This kind of decision (and this is certainly my case) stimulates consumers to rethink their position relating to such a prejudiced company.

Vladimir Ranevsky
São Paulo, Brazil

Dear Marvin,

I found Apple's decision to drop your *Where To Smoke* app appalling. I'm someone who has never used tobacco products and never will, but tobacco is a legal product that should at least be held to the same rights as marijuana.

As a nonsmoker, why would I subscribe to CIGAR AFICIONADO? You consistently have very good content and it's an interesting read. This latest issue is yet another fine example, with the piece on safaris and the long-form *Animal House* feature. Keep on smokin'!

Rob Nance
Westerville, Ohio

"I found Apple's decision to drop your *Where to Smoke* app appalling."

—Rob Nance, Westerville, Ohio

Dear Marvin,

I am a cigar smoker and a believer in the First Amendment. I don't own an iPhone. But your editors are wrong when they state that cigar smokers' First Amendment rights are being denied by Apple. Those rights are guaranteed to us by the Constitution and prevent the government from trampling on them. Private individuals and companies can deny free speech to others with relative impunity and the First Amendment is not violated.

Just as CIGAR AFICIONADO can print whatever it likes, Apple can sell whatever apps it chooses and ban whichever apps it doesn't like. First Amendment notwithstanding.

Kerry Montgomery
Portland, Oregon

Dear Marvin,

I've been a reader of CIGAR AFICIONADO since the first issue. One of my favorite sections is the Connoisseur's Corner that explores some of the best examples ever produced. Most, if not all, of the smokes reviewed are selections from the Holy Grail echelon of cigars. It sure would be nice to see what they look like.

Randy Venier
Encinitas, California

Editors' Response: We've never photographed the cigars for that section due to their age, and the fact that we sometimes have only one. But this is a great idea. We have found a way to show you some of the cigars in that particular section—and they look great. Turn to page 115 to see the new and improved Connoisseur's Corner.

Dear Marvin,

As someone who has been in magazine publishing for more than 25 years, I can appreciate all that you have accomplished. I know how much work goes on behind the scenes to create a great magazine. But in your case, you succeeded beyond your wildest dreams. Congratulations on not only a job well done, but on creating an incredible magazine.

I feel like a newbie to cigars, having started only in 2000 when a friend who was celebrating the birth of his granddaughter gave me a *Romeo y Julieta*. I thanked him and then set it on my desk wondering what to do with it. You see I had purchased a box of El Productos when my first daughter was born more than a decade earlier and they made me turn green. So I wasn't exactly a cigar fan. But a week later my friend was at the house for a party so I decided to give it a try. I was in shock. I'd never had a good cigar.

The next day I went down to my local tobacconist and asked for a mild cigar. He sold me four Don Tomás. It was a great start. It took me two years to finally find the cigar of my dreams—Padrón naturals, 1964s and 1926s. I have been a loyal Padrón smoker ever since (so I am doubly saddened to read of José Orlando Padrón's recent death). I'm always gratified to see your editors agree with my taste (or more accurately, I agree with theirs!) having made Padrón "Cigar of the Year" three times—more than any other brand. Your editors' opinions assured me I made the right choice. That is what a great magazine is supposed to do—guide your readers in the right direction.

I picked up my first copy of CIGAR AFICIONADO back when Hemingway was on the cover [July/August 1999]. I look alike and the clerk asked me if that was me on the cover. So I was reading you long before I ever fell in love with cigars. It says a lot about your magazine when the quality of your publication attracts readers who aren't even smokers (yet). I'm also a novelist and you've inspired me to include Padrón cigars in my novels.

I have been a longtime subscriber and fan, and thought after reading your 25th anniversary edition I had to let you and your readers know that from one publishing professional to the other, you and your crew have created a truly magnificent magazine.

Rick Pullen
Editor In Chief, Leaders' Edge Magazine
Fredericksburg, Virginia

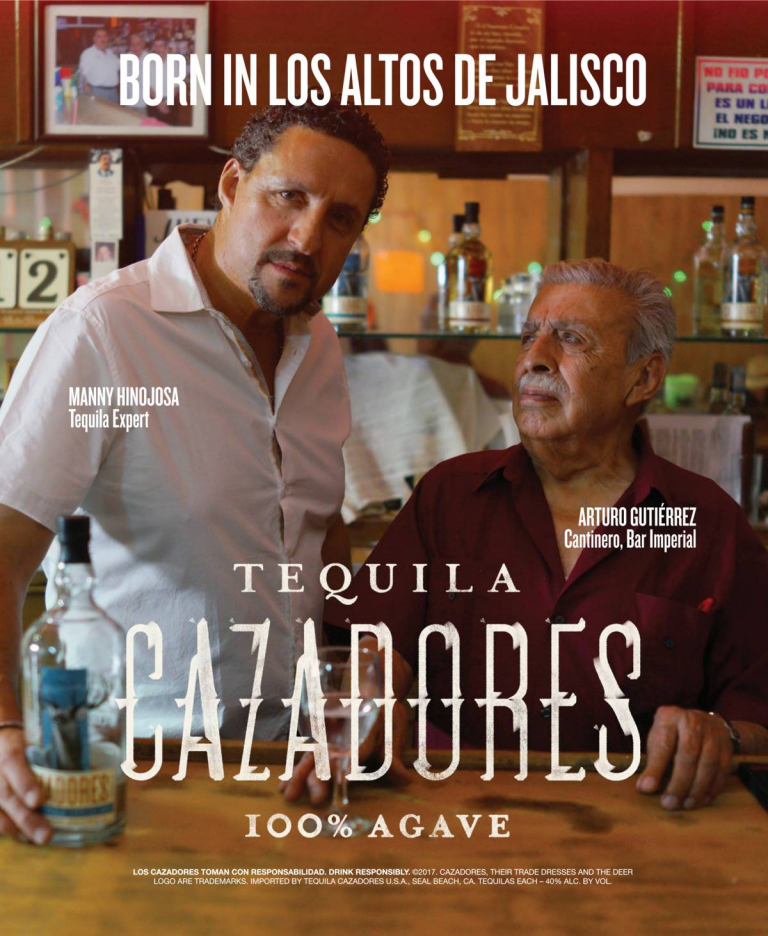
Dear Marvin,

First of all I would like to tell you how much I enjoy reading your magazine. I started to read it when I was a student in London.

A few years ago I found a box of Partagás that belonged to my grandpa, who had passed away. As soon as I opened the box the aroma came right to my face and I was transported back with my grandpa in his private library. Much of who I am nowadays is thanks to him, and having a cigar is like being able to be with him again.

Marzio Mari Ahrens
Gothenburg, Sweden

Correction: The table on page 61 of the Jan/Feb issue listed the wrong country of origin for the Rocky Patel Vintage 2003 Cameroon Churchill. The cigar is made in Honduras, not Nicaragua. ♦

A man and a woman are in a bar setting. The man, Manny Hinojosa, is on the left, wearing a white button-down shirt, looking towards the camera. The woman, Arturo Gutiérrez, is on the right, wearing a dark red button-down shirt, looking off to the side. They are both holding glasses of tequila. In the background, there are shelves with bottles of tequila and a sign that reads "NO FIBER PARA CO... ES UN LI... EL NEGRO... INO ES M...".

BORN IN LOS ALTOS DE JALISCO

MANNY HINOJOSA
Tequila Expert

ARTURO GUTIÉRREZ
Cantínero, Bar Imperial

TEQUILA CAZADORES 100% AGAVE

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GRAN RESERVA LIMITADA

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V

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Perfected by Time.*

ENCORE



CARRILLO

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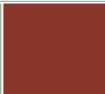
To explore the world of E.P. Carrillo visit www.epcarrillo.com.



good life guide

Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

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Mount Falcon Island, Ireland

Despite coming to the Mount Falcon Estate resort to escape the rigors of the Tour, Tiger Woods and Mark O'Meara were anything but subdued once they sat down to dinner. Barely eating, they vigorously debated the "pound for pound" fighting prowess of Atlantic salmon compared with Steelhead trout.

An idyllic 100-acre enclave close to western Ireland's serene River Moy legendary for angling, the Falcon was the ideal historic manor house to stir such fervent banter. A baronial, wooden-beamed structure once used primarily as a nobleman's "country pursuits" refuge, the Falcon provides guests with two miles of private fishing on both banks of the Moy, falconry, a golf driving range, a lounge stocked with Cuban cigars and a dozen championship golf courses within a one-hour drive of the property.

It's hard not to get caught up in the thrill of the Estate. Woods and O'Meara were in high spirits as they left the farm-to-table The Kitchen Garden Restaurant. Woods jumped onto O'Meara's shoulders, and acting like two young boys, they frolicked outside the 32-room country house, tumbling down the expansive lawn.

"Woods, John Cook, Scott McCarron, Nick Faldo, U2 band members, Joe Biden, they've all come here to switch off their minds, to have fun in this relatively undiscovered part of Ireland," exalts the Falcon's owner Alan Maloney. "Here jewel links courses are half the price of famous southwest [Irish] courses, and our having 15,000 salmon in the Moy is exceptional."

Situated in a woodlands flecked with walking trails near the rugged ocean cliffs along the Wild Atlantic Way, this countryside

haven is only a 1 1/2 hour drive from Shannon Airport.

Once known as The Castle, one of the premier fishing and shooting lodges in Ireland, the 1876-built Falcon still honors that noble history by pampering guests with luxury lodges, two spacious suites, and a variety of rejuvenating, highly fulfilling activities. You can walk with a hawk on a gloved fist through the estate's owl-studded woodlands or wander the the restaurant's three-acre garden, with its array of purple asparagus, cucamelon, edible flowers and beehives. A tour offers insights into the farm-to-table phenomenon, and is the perfect prelude to dining amid the nooks and crannies of The Castle's original kitchen.

The Falcon also provides supreme golf. If tangling with gusty winds, tall sea grasses and fear-inducing carries over cliffs is your idea of pleasure, you'll love to play here. On the beachside, Rosses Point Sligo is dotted with raised greens, burns, towering dunes and engulfing bunkers. Carne is beset by raging winds. Enniscrone affords sweeping views of the ocean.

Yet relief is never far here. The therapeutic spa and 17-meter indoor heated pool is one sort of cure-all. The intimate, wooden-beamed Boathole Bar, enlivened by typical Irish good cheer, offers its own elixirs. In this peaceful, fireplace-glowing sanctuary, premium whiskeys and Montecristos punctuate a day's explorations, allowing imaginations to soar majestically and unfettered like a falcon.

Visit mountfalcon.com

—Edward Kiersh



Sony 4K HDR Camcorder

Maybe it's time your video camera caught up with your television monitor. You could have been excused in the HD/1080p TV era if your camera was flat, rectangular, and capable of making phone calls. But if you want to take advantage of the contemporary 4K-display age, capturing landscapes or shooting in the absence of natural light, the hole-punch size lens on your smartphone will always pale in comparison to what you can do with a camcorder. Happily, the new age of user-friendly camcorders doesn't entail carrying a huge box on your shoulder or any geek-like technical proficiency.

With its sleek appearance, you mightn't recognize Sony's FDR-AX700 4K HDR (\$1,900) as a relative of the camera you owned before the smartphone revolution. Nor does it perform like it. Its 4K resolution upgrades the old gold standard of 1080p with twice the amount of pixels, making it easier than ever for amateurs to shoot professional-grade video. If you're thinking your iPhone, Samsung Galaxy or Google Pixel already shoots in 4K, remember that the Sony 4K HDR facilitates those pixels with a lens, professional-grade sensors and image processors that are simply too large to fit inside of cell phones and smaller cameras.

The 29mm Zeiss lens captures luminous high-dynamic-range video. It's primarily a wide-angle lens, ideal for filming landscapes, but the 12x optical zoom adds versatility, allowing you to capture

far away subjects without sacrificing quality. The image sensor, which captures light through the lens and transforms it into a digital image, is the same as the one-inch CMOS sensor that Sony uses in some of its professional-grade video cameras. The image processor, which converts raw data into a format that can be stored on a memory card, is the Bionz X borrowed from the company's most expensive DSLR digital cameras.

But don't let these professional-grade specs scare you. The operation of the Sony 4K HDR is essentially point and shoot. Choose between one of the four built-in neutral density filters, press record, and the camera will handle everything else. It even has a built-in HDMI port, so you can view your footage by plugging it directly into the television.

An ideal camera for travel, the Sony 4K HDR is compact and designed for handheld use. It also features two SD slots to record across two different memory cards without interruption.

Should shooting in true 4K inspire you to step up your filmmaking game, some advanced options will assist in your post-production and the camcorder also has a manual setting that provides an easy way of learning the ins and outs of aperture and shutter speed. What else could the budding Spielberg ask for?

Visit sony.com/electronics/camcorders/

—Blake Droesch

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Maple Syrup

Most sparkling wine is not Champagne, and most “pancake syrup” is not maple syrup. Maple syrup comes only from the sap of sugar maple trees, and like kangaroos or gorillas, Mother Nature saw fit to make these endemic solely to one part of one continent, northeastern North America, most famously Vermont but also the rest of New England, New York and Quebec, with some overflow into the Midwest and mid-Atlantic.

It takes 40 years for maple trees to mature into commercial sap producers, and unlike sticky tree substances, sugar maple sap is clear and thin, like water. It takes 40-45 gallons of sap to produce a single gallon of syrup. This is done by boiling sap in shallow pans until most water has evaporated. Nothing is added, and the entire process is devoted to reducing the purely natural product to its best and most essential ingredients. By law, maple syrup is just that, but be wary of plays on words like “maple flavored” or “100 percent natural maple product.”

Confusion arises over the range of colors and grades. All real maple syrup is high quality and has nearly the same density, clarity and sugar content (66.9-68.9 percent). It is graded solely by its color, which depends on when the syrup is made. Most production occurs in late winter and early spring, but as trees warm up the syrup becomes darker. A taste difference occurs, and like many red wines, flavor becomes stronger, richer or “bigger” as the color darkens. For years, the industry confused buyers with an arcane four-tiered grading system from Fancy to Grade A Medium Amber to Grade A Dark Amber and finally Grade B, but this suggests an inherent difference in quality, which simply is not the case. To simplify matters, Vermont, the best-known syrup producer, relabeled its grades into four more understandable

levels: Golden Color with Delicate Flavor; Amber Color with Rich Flavor; Dark Color with Robust Flavor; and Very Dark with Strong Flavor. In 2015 the USDA generally adopted Vermont’s standards for the entire nation, defining all four grades as Grade A by color: Golden, Amber, Dark and Very Dark. You may still see products labeled with a parenthetical: *(formerly known as...)*.

Generally, lighter syrup is ideal for delicate foods, like ice cream or yogurt, the darkest is good for cooking and sauces or as a molasses substitute, while the middle grades are perfect for maple syrup’s best-known use, over pancakes and waffles.

In another wrinkle, gourmet producers are now making high-quality flavored variants with real maple syrup. The best-known is Vermont’s Runamok Maple, which taps only certified organic trees—they have 81,000 on the slopes of the state’s highest peak Mount Mansfield. They make “regular” syrup and a collection of smoked, infused and barrel-aged products, so distinctive Oprah Winfrey named a mixed selection one of her “favorite things of 2016.” Runamok produces nearly a dozen varieties, including Bourbon, Rum and Rye Barrel-Aged, Pecan Wood Smoked, Hibiscus Flower or Cardamom Infused, and the wildly popular Cinnamon + Vanilla Infused.

Visit runamokmaple.com

—Larry Olmsted

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Indian Roadmaster

Long ago, my late father placed me between his knees on an Indian motorcycle, engaged its infamous so-called suicide clutch, and took me down the road in a happy mist of rumbling, thunderous, vibrating glee. I was four, the bike was a post-World War II model, my old man was wearing a grin and his aviator goggles, and I was in love.

Such images—whimsical conjurings, really—catch your imagination, your emotions, your longings, and put you in a place you'd far rather be than where you are (like your desk at work). They are personal choices that run a gamut from horse riding out on the open plains, to rock climbing in Monument Valley, piloting a glider over the Pacific coast, or—in my case—riding a motorcycle damn near anywhere.

Recently, I reconciled my nostalgia with the present day by test driving a bike that links the two: the Indian Roadmaster, a gleaming, jet-black, chrome-accented, nearly 1,000-pound, 1,811 cc (111 cu in) metallic land yacht that comes loaded with accessories (\$29,999).

Founded in 1901, Indian has long symbolized the dream of the open-road—even since the original Springfield, Massachusetts, manufacturer shuttered in 1953 and the name stumbled along from owner to owner, some of whom simply rebranded their imports. The company's most recent—and promising—incarnation builds a

fleet of all-new Indians in Iowa that nod to the touchstones of its original design, but bring the bikes up to date.

Fittingly, I visited Dennis Bolduc's Indian Motorcycle of Springfield to ride the newest Indian.

Dennis—a walking, talking, gregarious encyclopedia and collector of all things Indian—gave me a backroads route, and set me free. And while I'm here to tell you that visions of rock climbing never crossed my mind, that Roadmaster flew like a glider and handled like the best-trained cutting horse you've ever seen. Despite its weight, it handled far better than the 700-pound bike I'm riding these days. At all times it felt like a great pair of skis on a perfectly groomed slope. Wherever I leaned, it went—responsive, lively, hugely powerful, and—when pushed here and there—the tiniest bit skittish, but just enough to keep me aware and appreciative.

Throw in heated seats and handles, crystal-clear audio, cruise control for those open roads, and a large-screen GPS package with all the expected nuts and bolts—intuitively placed and easily manipulated—and you've got an idea of how much the Indian has evolved, and how well it's matured from that first ride, now over 60 years ago.

It turns out that quite a few things improve with age.
Visit indianmotorcycle.com

—Archer Mayor



*La
Opulencia*

Richness and Abundance, just as its name, this is what the new "My Father La Opulencia" is all about. Criollo and Corojo Binders, Corojo, Criollo and Habano Filler all coming from selected farms such as finca El Pedrero, Las Lometas and La Bonita, all property of the García family. Finished with a beautiful Mexico Rosado Oscuro wrapper, creating this medium to 3/4 body cigar with the perfect combination of aroma, flavors and complexity.

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MY FATHER
CIGARS

Don Pepin García
FAMILY



Rolex Cosmograph Daytona

“Ask any driver here what they’re looking for, and it’s one of these,” says the champion racecar driver Scott Pruett showing off one of the Rolex watches he owns as a multiple winner of the Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona. “As great as trophies are, there is nothing quite as special as this.”

The watch he means is the Rolex Cosmograph Daytona. Launched in 1963, the Cosmograph Daytona was designed to be a high-precision timing tool for endurance racing that measures intervals within one-eighth of a second and has a tachymetric scale for calculating average speeds. Now it is awarded to winners of the race, which Rolex first sponsored in 1992.

“I still literally get goose bumps every time I come here,” says Pruett at this year’s race. He retired after his 25th entrance in the race this year (also the 25th anniversary of Rolex’s sponsorship). Pruett shares the record for five victories in the famed endurance race with racing legend Hurley Haywood and has quite a few watches to show for it.

Rolex has a far-reaching legacy at Daytona International Speedway, a cathedral of motorsport. Next to the track in the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America, you can see Sir Malcolm Campbell’s Blue Bird V, which Campbell piloted on the hard-packed coquina sands of Daytona Beach to claim the world speed

record in 1935. The 28-foot, 2,300-horsepower machine hit more than 330 mph as Campbell averaged 276.816 mph, while wearing a Rolex Oyster. The run established Daytona as the place where drivers come to “haul ass,” in the words of Pruett.

The most famous Rolex Daytona was worn by Paul Newman, better known as an actor, but skilled enough to win his class at the 1995 24 Hours of Daytona at the age of 70. He acquired the watch, however, in 1969 as a gift from his wife, actress Joanne Woodward, at a time when his enthusiasm for racing was dawning. The inscription read: *Drive Carefully Me*. Newman was so often photographed wearing the watch, with its creamy dial and black sub-counters (known as a panda dial) that the highly coveted model was dubbed The Paul Newman. His personal Daytona, a present to his daughter Nell’s boyfriend James Cox in the early 1980s, recently fell under the hammer for \$15.5 million (\$17.8 million including fees) at a Phillip’s auction in New York last October, smashing the record for the most expensive wristwatch ever sold.

Less storied versions of the winner’s watch can be had for \$16,900 (the rare entry-level watch is \$12,400). Unlike Pruett’s, the back of yours won’t be engraved with the word “winner.”

Visit rolex.com

—Laurie Kahle

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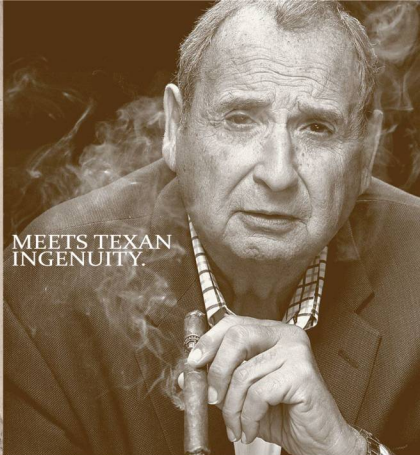
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A cross section of our cigar portfolio.



Meet Mezcal

Close your eyes and take a sip of a good mezcal and you might envision the bucolic scene from which it springs.

Huge agave piñas roast over wood fire in an earthen pit. A horse slowly traces circles around a mill, pulling the stone wheel that grinds the raw material into juice. Airborne yeast ferments the liquid in wooden vats before a wood-fueled pot still distills it.

Once derided as a crude cousin of Tequila, mezcal is gaining respect and fans through the artisanal traditions that give it its spicy and smoky character. Understanding and tasting mezcal are the keys to appreciating it. First forget the worm. You'll not encounter one in any listed here. Next, know that while Tequila has stricter production regulations (it is limited mainly to the state of Jalisco and made out of nothing but blue agave), mezcal, which can be made in nine Mexican states, takes advantage of the option to use any of about 30 agave species. Espadin is well known in the U.S. Tobalá is the most common of the wild agaves.

Mezcal uses some of the same age designations as Tequila. *Joven* (sometimes called *blanca*) is unaged. *Reposado* indicates two to nine months in wood, and *añejo* is matured at least a year. Many purists, however, reject aging as they prefer to taste the agave's charms unadorned by wood.

After years of importing industrial mezcal, the U.S. is now privy to artisanal products. The latest is from George Clooney's Casamigos (80 proof, \$60), with pronounced fruits like peach and banana. Chichicapa (92 proof, \$70), part of Del Maguey's Single Village collection, smacks of mint, citrus, salt and oak. Sombra (90 proof, \$45) is a slightly smoky joven, which delivers bright citrus, mint and bread dough flavors. Leyenda makes a blanco in the state of Puebla that is fermented from tobalá agave and quite fruity with a mint and toffee (94 proof, \$85). The Kimo Sabe joven combines steamed and roasted agave to produce a bright profile with sweetness, lemon and tea (86 proof, \$40). Cooked in an autoclave instead of oven roasted, Zignum Añejo lacks the smoke of the other mezcals, but at 18 months is smooth and sugary with vanilla (80 proof, \$50). Creyente (80 proof, \$60) blends mezcal from two regions for a meaty, peppery taste. Illegal Añejo (80 proof, \$110) shows chocolate, fruits and leather. Montelobos (86.4 proof, \$40) achieves a good balance between smoke and spicy jalapeño.

In his comprehensive book *Finding Mezcal* (Ten Speed Press, \$30), Del Maguey founder Ron Cooper lists 40 cocktails made with mezcal, but a good cigar also makes a great mixer.

—Jack Bettridge



PXG Golf Clubs

Anyone who would name his company Parsons Extreme Golf, or PXG, isn't going to be subtle. And Bob Parsons believes he's gone to the extreme to create the finest clubs money can buy—quite a lot of money—say \$5,000.

After founding the Internet domain-name giant GoDaddy (Parsons sold most of the company for GoZillions in 2011) he got hooked on golf. Soon Parsons was spending \$300,000 a year on golf clubs and decided to make his own. Now six years later, Parsons Extreme Golf turns out distinctive looking clubs that are custom-fitted through distinctive golf facilities across the United States and, he says, 30 countries around the globe. Parsons, who renders the final verdict on every club his designers come up with, knows who his audience is.

"We look at PXG as a luxury brand rather than a golf club brand," says Parsons. "We don't believe we compete with most golf club companies that cater to the entire market. We don't go to the PGA show in Orlando, we don't sell through discounters or big box stores because we believe that is not our customer. That's maintaining the integrity and persona of the brand. Our clubs have to be eye-opening performers."

Parsons irons have a forged appearance, but the forgiveness of cavity-backed clubs because a cavity is hidden inside the head. The head has a perimeter of shallow ports that allow for custom balance. The face of the irons is super-thin with a thermoplastic-elastomer behind it to prevent cave-ins and enhance feel.

"Our wedges are the only ones that are 100 percent milled," says Parsons. "We use a machine that cuts each wedge out of an 11-pound block of steel. The milling process takes four and a half hours for each wedge. Our grooves conform to USGA requirement, but they are very precise, very close to what the limit is. The design is very appealing to the eye." Drivers and fairway metals are complex and weighted to square the clubface at impact. Of course, he makes putters, 12 different models.

Parsons also wants you to have an "Experience." For \$17,500, "The Experience" lets you spend three days at the Scottsdale National Golf Club (which Parsons owns) being fitted for clubs and playing three rounds of golf. Two nights at the Four Seasons Resort, some meals and other amenities are included. Then there's the "Ultimate Experience." For \$100,000, you get a four-day club fitting and playing experience for two people with private air transportation from anywhere in the United States.

Tour pro Billy Horschel, a winner of the AT&T Byron Nelson this season, plays and endorses PXG clubs, speaks of the Bob Parsons effect, "Bob wants to build the best product possible and use the latest, best materials to do that," says Horschel. "So he built clubs that cost a lot more than the others out there, but they also perform really well. I think, even to his surprise, he found a market for them bigger than what he expected."

Visit pxg.com

—Jeff Williams

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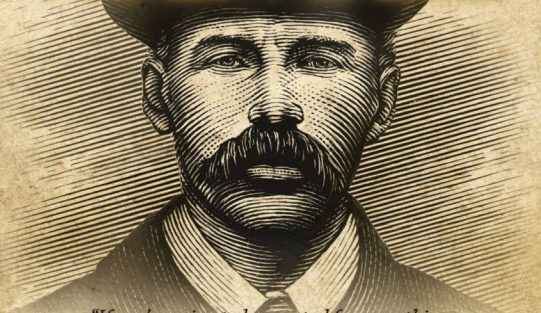
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—Cornelius Bailey, AKA Straight Shooter

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Quasar Tabletop Cutter

You'd be forgiven if you mistook Colibri's newest cutter for something that may have broken off of Elon's Musk's Falcon Heavy rocket during its historic space launch in February. With a cosmic name and sharp, protruding angles that are reminiscent of a child's abstraction of a star, the Quasar certainly appears like it could be a futuristic object that fell from the heavens. The Quasar is not built for space travel, but instead is a two-in-one cigar cutter built for your tabletop. And it just happens to be one of the best on the market.

The Quasar tabletop cutter (\$125) is the newest in Colibri's Quasar series, which includes an ashtray and limited-edition humidor. The line's hallmark is the pyramidal motif that's carried throughout. It drew inspiration from the shapely Hearst building in New York City as well as the hobnail pattern on Colibri's Molecetric lighter from the 1960s. Elegant, yet masculine, classic but also futuristic, the Quasar cutter commands the eye's attention. But the real beauty of the device is what's housed inside its cuboid shape.

Built from solid metal and weighing about one pound and five ounces, the Quasar features two stainless-steel cutters to snip your smokes. When you push down on the Quasar's top, four oiled pistons pop up and reveal the unit's cutting blades in unison. On one side of the cube is a double-guillotine cutter capable of swiftly snipping cigars up to 70 ring gauge. If you prefer a wedge cut, or cat's eye, opposite the straight blades is a V-cutter option that can handle smokes up to 60 ring gauge.

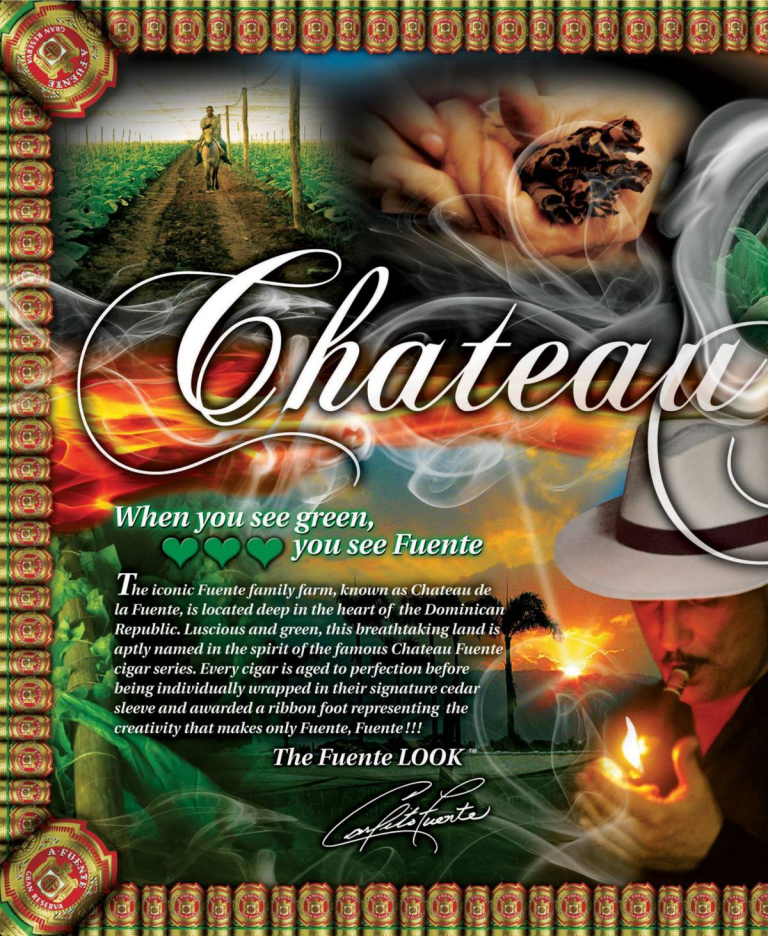
The oiled pistons ensure that the cutting action is smooth, and both blades are more than capable of easily cutting cigars of all shapes, from figurados to parejos. The clippings collect in an inner chamber, which is accessed and emptied via a twist cap on the bottom of the unit. Additionally, a rubber gasket on the bottom of the Quasar prevents it from slipping or damaging your desktop.

While the Quasar doesn't come in space-suit white, it is available in black, red, gunmetal and silver.

Visit colibri.com

—Andrew Nagy





Chateau

When you see green,
♥♥♥ you see Fuente

The iconic Fuente family farm, known as Chateau de la Fuente, is located deep in the heart of the Dominican Republic. Luscious and green, this breathtaking land is aptly named in the spirit of the famous Chateau Fuente cigar series. Every cigar is aged to perfection before being individually wrapped in their signature cedar sleeve and awarded a ribbon foot representing the creativity that makes only Fuente, Fuente!!!

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Old Master Drawings

Maybe you can't afford the \$450 million that a Leonardo da Vinci oil painting recently fetched at auction. But if you're looking to set your sights a little lower many drawings by Old Master painters are well within reach.

"You can get a drawing for a fraction of the price but it's still the work of the same genius," says Elisabeth Lobkowicz, an Old Master paintings specialist at Sotheby's. "We have drawings from \$1,000 to \$1 million." She adds that drawings—smaller and more intimate than paintings—let you feel as if you were standing alongside the artist, looking at the same scene, as he worked. Whether a particular drawing is a study for an ambitious painting—e.g. Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling—or something that simply captured the artist's eye at a distant moment, it "is the handwriting of the artist," Lobkowicz explains. It could be Rembrandt as he knocked off a Dutch landscape. Or Giovanni Battista Tiepolo as he sketched street life scenes in 18th-century Venice.

I know because I bought a Tiepolo at auction a few years back for a couple of

thousand bucks. The artist may be best known for his colorful frescos in cathedrals and palaces that feature puffy clouds and hovering putti—winged cherubs—but the image I purchased is somewhat more, um, accessible. It's part of a series of drawings, many of which reside in the Metropolitan Museum's prestigious Robert Lehman Collection. The auction catalogue discreetly described it as "Caricature of A Man Seen From Behind." That's code for a fellow relieving himself on the sidewalk.

These days, art galleries and auction houses display their works online, giving you the ability to zoom in and study every detail of a drawing before deciding whether to make a bid. Their own experts also scour smaller auctions for overlooked treasures and you can, too. Value depends not only on the fame of the artist, but also the condition of the work. After all, they're just ink or pencil on paper—very old paper.

"Feel free to contact the auction house," says Lobkowicz. "The experts are always willing to talk to you and will have a better understanding of the market."

While future financial return is a possibility, the best advice always is to "Buy things you like to live with," Lobkowicz advises.

And then there's the bragging rights. Picasso's 1955 painting *Les Femmes d'Alger* fetched \$179.4 million at Christie's in 2015. But some of his drawings can go for less than you'd pay for a vintage watch and impress your friends and neighbors even more. I've made back the investment on my drawing in the pleasure it gives me. And I won't lie. It's also fun to tell visitors, "That's a Tiepolo."

Visit sothebys.com

—Ralph Gardner Jr.





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Standing Tall

Joe Manganiello made his mark by sculpting his body, but the cigar-loving actor has dreams of succeeding on the other side of the camera

**BY MARSHALL FINE
PORTRAITS BY PETER YANG**

STYLING BY NEIL RODGERS FOR TRACEY MATTINGLY
GROOMING BY DIANA SCHMIDTKE FOR ART-DEPT
suit by Joseph Abboud • sweater by Theory





Joe Manganiello relaxes in a chair by a large card table in a sprawling basement rec room in his Beverly Hills home, right next to the man cave where he keeps his humidor.

Manganiello, who has been talking about his cigar collection, looks up and smiles when his wife, actress Sofia Vergara, pokes her head into the room. Vergara, as breathtakingly striking in person as she is onscreen, returns his smile as she says, "Would anyone like something to drink?"

After a housekeeper brings the beverages, Manganiello (pronounced MANG-uh-nello) takes a moment to recall the first time he understood that fine tobacco required a more sophisticated approach than he'd known.

"It was probably after I started 'True Blood,'" the Pittsburgh native says, taking a sip of his water. "There was a cigar bar on Sunset Boulevard next to the Sunset Towers. They had a great back patio, where I used to go all the time to read scripts or have meetings or just meet friends. I just stumbled upon it—and they had Cubans. You can get fake Cubans a lot of places, but they had the real thing. A couple of the guys there had watched 'True Blood' and knew who I was, so they opened up the wall safe and pulled out a bunch of Cohibas. I smoked those with them and kept coming back."

In person, the six-foot-five Manganiello is impossibly welcoming, towering but warm. Though he's dressed casually in black jeans and a long-sleeve, steel-colored Henley shirt, he can't disguise the powerful build underneath. While gray has begun to dominate his beard, the salt-and-pepper facial hair belies an otherwise youthful face: a hawkish profile that features a strong chin, aquiline nose and eyes which can harden onscreen to the Clint-like squint of a seriously tough guy or soften to reveal the funny, emotionally attuned human within. He has the lanky looseness of an athlete, someone who has learned how to live in that large frame, and a boyish enthusiasm that takes over when he talks about cigars.

"I probably started collecting seriously—with a really good humidor—in 2012 or 2013," he says. "There's some debate about which is my oldest [cigar], but I have an '05-'06 Partagás that's probably it," he says. He has a dwindling stash of special Cuban Cohiba cigars reserved for dignitaries as diplomatic gifts "with the seal of Castro," he says. They're powerful. "These cigars will put you on your ass—they're real elephant legs. We smoked a couple when my brother had his first baby. They're for special occasions. I've got five and once they're gone, they're gone."

The room where Manganiello's tall humidor resides resembles a glassed-in medieval dining room, complete with a banquet table and chairs. On the wall is a realistic-looking dragon's head—Manganiello is a big fantasy fan.

He's also a fan of cigars that are fat and powerful. "I like a bigger ring gauge, and I like a strong cigar," he says. He has a

special affinity for Partagás cigars, which he explains as he takes out one rolled in 2008. "My favorite—these are delicious," he says. "And I have a drawer of Daniel Marshall for everyday. They're a little more affordable."

Cigars play a role when Manganiello acts. "When you're on the set, you have downtime—when they're changing the camera or setting the lights," he says. "So I will start a cigar. When they're ready for me, I put it aside. And when I'm done with the scene, I light up and keep going while they set up for the next one."

At age 41, Manganiello has had ample opportunity to light up on set, appearing in two hit *Magic Mike* films and having a four-season run as a heartthrob werewolf on HBO's "True Blood." On April 20, he will appear in the big-budget, action-fantasy *Rampage*, opposite Dwayne Johnson. He also dipped his toe into the DC Extended Universe as super-villain Deathstroke, popping up in the role at the tail-end of the credits of 2017's *Justice League*. Manganiello will get a more extended shot at the character when he plays opposite Ben Affleck in the upcoming *The Batman*.

It's telling which aspect of playing Deathstroke gets him talking: "I have to wear a mask, and there's a real style and technique to that," he says. "Mask-work is something I haven't done since I was at Carnegie Mellon."

Yes, Manganiello is a bit of a theater nerd. Or just a plain nerd, period. There's a lot more to the man than just his muscles.

"It's the most surprising aspect about Joe," says Brad Peyton, who directed Manganiello as an ultra-tough mercenary in *Rampage*. "I'm a giant nerd, a proud video-gamer who loves things like Dungeons & Dragons. And Joe is the same way—in the body of a six-foot-five muscle-bound human being."

"Joe is not all brawn by any means," says actor Adam Rodriguez, who became friends with Manganiello on the set of *Magic Mike*. "He's a really intelligent guy. I think he's an artist in the body of an athlete. And the bastard has the body of Adonis."

"From the moment I met Joe, I was just blown away by his strength, his muscles and his look," says Arnold Schwarzenegger, Manganiello's idol. The two worked together on the 2014 film *Sabotage*. "In the '70s, he could have easily been on stage at a bodybuilding show. He has that classic muscular look that everyone wants. But it's what I found behind the muscles that really impressed me. Joe has a huge vision, and he's also a sweetheart of a guy, with a huge heart. He's the kind of guy who does on his wife, gets you the perfect gift for your birthday or shows up to give away toys in East L.A. to less fortunate kids. Don't ever look at the six-pack, or eight-pack, or 12-pack, or whatever he has now, and think that's all he is."

The rippling physique that has become Manganiello's trademark is the product of long hours of work in the gym. He even wrote a 2013 book on fitness called *Evolution*. He looks like a man who has lifted for his entire life, but he didn't focus on weights when he was a high school player. "I was a skinny kid, but a good athlete," he says. He was drawn to the arts long before athletics.

"I'm not a young buck anymore. I'm a crafty older guy."

Hollywood power couple Sofia Vergara and Joe Manganiello at the 2015 Emmy Awards in Los Angeles.





Mangiello with his idol Arnold Schwarzenegger (top, from *Sabotage*), in HBO's "True Blood" (right) and with Channing Tatum (above) in *Magic Mike*.



His impulses toward creative expression began years before Mangiello sprouted into the tall teen who dominated his high-school football and basketball teams. He was tracking toward a college sports scholarship, until a football injury left him with a torn-up knee and the time to audition for the senior musical.

"As a kid, I was an artist. I painted and wrote and created stories," he says. "But I was a good athlete...In Pittsburgh, that's just what you did. It was late in the second half of high school when I got hurt. It was time to figure out what I wanted to do professionally. It became clear when I got back into the arts. I realized that was what I was really passionate about, that this was the way to be artistically fulfilled. Then I figured out how to have a career as an artist that was also partly athletic."

He dreamed of applying to a hometown institution: the highly selective Carnegie Mellon School of Drama. He auditioned during his senior year of high school, only to be rejected. "I wasn't really ready," he admits. "While I'd been playing sports, everyone else had been performing and focusing on that. By the time I got out of sports, they were way ahead of me. When I auditioned, I didn't really know what I was doing, and they did."

He took a year to hone his craft, "working my ass off," he says, and went back for another audition, this time getting in. "It proved to be such a great place to work. Role after role now, I still blow the dust off the old tricks I learned back then. Like acting with a mask."

Mangiello always had a natural athleticism. But being in front of the camera requires a different kind of commitment to his art. He may not be a bodybuilder, but he had to look like one. He gradually developed an appreciation for the kind of body sculpting necessary to be an action star.

"I liked being healthy, feeling healthy," he says. "And it's fun to push your physical form around." Chiseled, cut, ripped—choose your adjective and it describes Mangiello, whether he was shedding his clothes (just before he turned into a large wolf) in "True Blood" or as a male entertainer in *Magic Mike*. But Mangiello maintains that the emotional challenge of acting is more daunting than the physical demands of bodybuilding.

"Working out is fun," he says. "But playing Stanley Kowalski eight times a week? That's tough. That's the real challenge."

He's in no hurry to go back to theater: "I have to say I love the exhilaration of film sets. I love the permanent, yet fleeting nature of film. It lasts forever but it's the only time you'll perform it. And so you put everything you've got into that moment. That's really exciting to me. I do love the live audience in theater: the feedback, the interface. But film is what made me want to be an actor."

Mangiello seemed to make an effortless leap from Carnegie Mellon to Hollywood. He was cast almost straight out of college to play Peter Parker's high school nemesis, bully Flash Thompson, in the 2002 *Spider-Man*. The film was a hit, but Mangiello was unable to capitalize on that auspicious debut. "That film was amazing," Mangiello says. "But then—well, I needed to quit drinking." He'd struggled with alcohol addiction from high school through college, and once in Hollywood, he went off the deep end at the first taste of success. "My life was ruined. I was homeless, careless and broke with no career," he told *Men's Health* in 2016. Sitting in his home now, he says that he stopped drinking, started working construction jobs and eventually got to a place where he was ready to start auditioning for acting roles again. "When I got the drinking taken care of, the work came back," he says. "It was just my time. I needed to handle all that."

Mangiello has the look of a romantic hero, and he played that role in "True Blood," the show that really launched him during his 2010–14 run. But he's shown he can deftly handle comedy as well. He's appeared on hit TV sitcoms like "How I Met Your Mother" and "Two and a Half Men," and while his *Magic Mike* role may have been built around his physique and physicality, it played to his comic talents as well. "He brought a kind of goofiness to that role, a willingness to be absurd," says Steven



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SUN GROWN

MADURO

COROJO

SHADE

SUN GROWN

MADURO

COROJO

SHADE

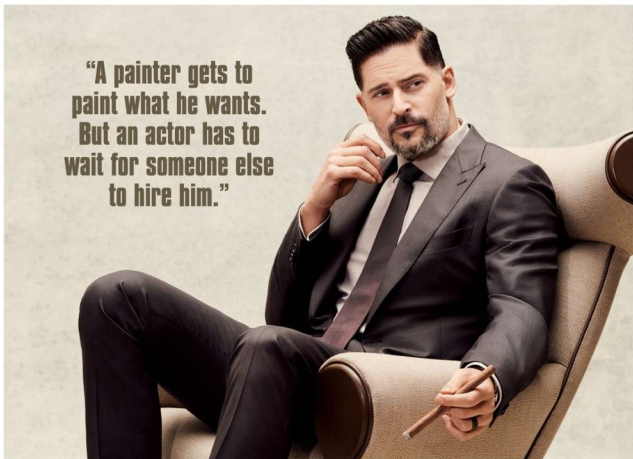
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**"A painter gets to
paint what he wants.
But an actor has to
wait for someone else
to hire him."**



Soderbergh, the Oscar winner who directed the film and produced and shot its sequel. "He had this understanding that this character is someone who takes himself seriously—and that there's a deep vein of humor in a character like this. Joe was in on the joke and understood totally how to play that rich comic figure. He was inside and yet able to look at it from a distance."

Manganiello even appeared in the 2016 *Pee-wee's Big Holiday*, opposite the goofy and childlike character Pee-wee Herman. At one point, the massive Manganiello is clad in the same slim-fit, gray-plaid suit and red bow-tie as the much smaller Pee-wee.

"Joe's sense of silliness is the reason I like him so much in the movie," says Paul Reubens, who has played Pee-wee for nearly 40 years. "A director friend of mine wrote me after it came out to rave about Joe. He said, 'There's not a single hint of irony in his performance' and I thought that was a huge compliment... He's a phenomenal actor."

The film also changed the profile of some of the fans who recognize Manganiello when he's traveling. (The lifelong Pittsburgh fan goes to as many Steelers games as he can.) "I'd get girls, but I'd also get guys who knew who I was but would say, 'My girlfriend would kill me if I didn't get a picture with you,'" Manganiello says. "And I'd think, 'Why not just admit you want a picture with me?'" Doing the film with Reubens means his demographic now also can

skew younger. "Joe told me a few months ago that, when he's in an airport, he gets little kids saying to their parents, 'Look—it's Pee-wee's friend,'" says Reubens. "Although I will say that when I hang out with him, he gets plenty of recognition from women, too."

But there's only one woman for Manganiello: Vergara, to whom he's been married for two years. It is the first marriage for Manganiello, who met the Emmy-winning "Modern Family" star in 2014 and proposed marriage six months later.

"The biggest adjustment in marriage? Coming to grips with the idea that someone who is not related to you could possibly love you that much," Manganiello says. "There's nobody I'd rather spend time with. She was it for me."

"People say things like, 'Marriage and relationships are work.' But it's not. Life is hard. Having somebody to help you deal with it is the greatest thing that ever happened. It's such an easy relationship—easy in all the right ways. Looking back on the relationships I had before this, I think the universe was giving me some tough practice so I'd get this right."

Manganiello and Vergara will appear together in this year's *Stano*, an independent film that he developed, produced and stars in. He plays a one-time baseball phenom whose career is derailed before it gets started, and who must reassemble his life after almost 20 years in prison. "I read the script and knew it was a

great role for me—then it was a five-year struggle of getting it made,” Manganiello says. “It’s a story about redemption and putting your life back together. It’s more like what I used to do in college drama school.” The straight dramatic role is the first step in his plan to create and produce films of his own. “There was a teacher at the Moscow Art Theater who summed it up this way: You have to be an artist, but you also have to be a bill-payer,” says Manganiello. “And you have to make them both be happy. So I’m the one who pushes me. You get offered the last thing you did. But most artists want to continue to grow, to move on to the next thing. That’s the challenge to a career as an actor. A painter gets to paint what he wants. But an actor has to wait for someone else to hire him. As an actor coming up, you take jobs you’re not passionate about, or you lose jobs you would be passionate for.”

Although *Stano* is small budget, Manganiello has dreams to make bigger films as well. “I want to get to a place where I can finally shape things the way I want them. I want to be able to write, direct, produce, act, and do it in my own big-budget sci-fi feature. And I want to write and direct and act in a really nuanced independent film. I’ve started the long trajectory toward those goals.”

“The good news is that he’s focused on expanding his ability beyond just appearing in front of a camera,” Soderbergh says. “Anyone who understands the business and wants to do that is smart. If you’re an actor still waiting to be called to work, you don’t know what you’re doing.”

Part of his long-term vision stems from turning 40 last year. “It probably hit me during *Magic Mike XXL* that if we even thought of doing another one, we wouldn’t be young anymore. Turning 40 solidified that,” he says with a smile. “I’m not a young buck anymore. I’m a crafty older guy.”

Manganiello has forged a friendship with Schwarzenegger, another cigar-smoking crafty older guy, who wrote the foreword to Manganiello’s fitness book. “He has the ability to put a smile on anyone’s face,” Manganiello says of the former California governor. “He makes people feel good about themselves. He takes really good care of himself and he’s incredibly smart. He smashed all the stereotypes about bodybuilders. Arnold is proof that Renaissance men do exist. I asked how he gets so much done and he said, ‘You have to learn to sleep faster.’”

For Schwarzenegger, the feeling is mutual. “I think if you tell Joe to do 10 reps, he would do 20,” Schwarzenegger says. “That’s just part of his intensity. When he does something, he isn’t content with doing it halfway. He isn’t even content with doing it 100 percent. He has to go beyond.”

Manganiello’s urge to go beyond his recent résumé and make smaller, independent films will have to strike a balance with Hollywood’s interest in turning him into an action star. Peyton’s

experience directing Manganiello in *Rampage* has whetted his appetite for more: “He’s an artist mixed with a gamer geek. He puts his creativity into those worlds, which is why he’s so good in movies like that. He just gets them. I’m actively looking to work with him again.”

Asked to reveal something people wouldn’t guess about Manganiello, Soderbergh chuckles and says, “Most people don’t know Joe wears super-thick glasses. He’s really blind without them. There’s this assumption you have that he’s perfect, but the first time you see him in the glasses, you go, ‘Whoa, wait a minute.’ It’s like a Clark Kent moment.” Which is interesting, given Manganiello’s close call with playing Superman in 2013’s *Man of Steel* and its sequels. Considered for the role, he ultimately couldn’t reconcile conflicts with his “True Blood” obligations.

As Manganiello takes on the role of DC super-villain Deathstroke, he should end up with plenty of opportunities to fill his spare time on the movie set with more than a few choice cigars. “I don’t shy away from them. Cigars are a great way to socialize. That’s the beauty of a cigar: A good one takes an hour, or an hour and a half. The way attention spans are going, everyone spends their time fiddling with their phone and doing everything they can to not pay attention to the person they’re sitting across from. But a cigar forces you to bond with other human beings.”

Manganiello sometimes smokes cigars with the Terminator. “When you smoke a stogie with Joe, the intensity dissipates with the smoke, and you can see his sense of humor, his heart, and his intelligence,” says Schwarzenegger. “You can have a long conversation about any subject that will last through a full smoke and then some, and both of you will leave feeling better off.”

Manganiello remains focused on the future. And it comes as no surprise that the man who works so hard in the gym to build his body doesn’t take any part of his current situation for granted.

“I can’t sleep unless I know I’ve done my best,” Manganiello says. “I can accept failure, or ‘No,’ if I did my best. I don’t wake up in acceptance. When I wake up, my first thought is, ‘There’s work to do.’ When I lay my head down at night, I have to accept where I’m at.”

“Am I happy with my life? Absolutely. But the finish line is constantly moving. When I was younger and greener, I probably thought there was one finish line and a race to get over it. When I got older, I realized there is no finish line—you just keep going and going and going. And whatever happens in your life is fuel for what you do in your work.” ♦

Contributing editor Marshall Fine is critic-in-residence at The Picture House Regional Film Center in Pelham, NY.





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Who will Win The Masters?

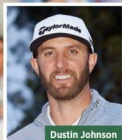
When the best names in golf tee it up this month at Augusta, who will emerge wearing the green jacket? **BY JEFF WILLIAMS**



Jason Day



Rickie Fowler



Dustin Johnson



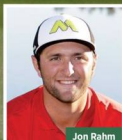
Jordan Spieth



Justin Rose



Justin Thomas



Jon Rahm



Sergio Garcia



Rory McIlroy



Hideki Matsuyama

The Masters is soon upon us,

and for those in the cold climes, we've already gotten the clubs out of storage, rid them of cobwebs, bought a dozen new balls, taken some achy swings on the range and made those initial forays down thawing fairways. As spring comes out of hibernation the annual rite of golf, the Masters, bursts into the golf spectrum like a supernova. Azaleas, Magnolia Lane, Rae's Creek, Amen Corner and the green jacket combine for the game's ultimate field of dreams.

There is a cherished certainty to the Masters, its home the gracious and graceful Augusta National Golf Club. We know what to expect every year—plenty of birdies and eagles, round-killing double bogeys, dramatic lead swings and a brilliantly stormy march through the back nine on Sunday where all the greats of the game have made their mark.

There is another cherished certainty that we all play into—we don't know who is going to win, but we love to make a prediction and maybe put down a few bucks on the outcome, even if it's just a five-spot with a friend. While golf isn't a big betting entity at the Las Vegas sports books, it has gained some momentum over the last 10 years, and the current crop of highly competitive players makes the betting prospects for this year's tournament diverse and appetizing.

This we know about picking a winner: He has to be long off the tee (at least long enough) and be precise with his irons, has to have one heckuva short game, be able to putt lights out, and most important of all, has to have steady nerves to manage his game and enough nerve to take on a challenging shot on the back nine on Sunday when winning is on the line. It's a tall order to join the greats of the game. Here's who we think have the best chances to claim victory when the tournament concludes on April 8.

THE BEST BETS

10 Sergio Garcia

This is a sentimental choice, just like Garcia's playoff victory in the 2017 Masters was a sentimental culmination to his career. Only three players have won the Masters back-to-back: Tiger Woods, Nick Faldo and Jack Nicklaus. We are talking iconic players here, and Garcia never made it into that category despite a spectacular start as a 19-year-old when he finished second to Woods in the 1999 PGA Championship.

But Garcia is an accomplished player with nothing to apologize for in his career. He won three times last year and was the European Tour player of the year. Can he do it again? We have watched him hover around the upper echelons of the game his whole life, watched him win the 2008 Players Championship, watched him spearhead Europe in the Ryder Cup. For him, it almost always comes down to the putter. If the putts drop, his chances soar.

PREVIOUS: ROB SCHUMACHER/USA TODAY SPORTS; INSETS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LEN ALABRY/CON SPORTSWIRE, MARTIN DONOHUE/ERIC CANAL+CAL SPORT MEDIA, MICHAEL DRYER/KABLAN; (BIBBLE) KYODO; ANTHONY NEMETHICAL SPORT MEDIA; GREGORY BULLING/HAN GUAN KYODO; ALL TOP IMAGES



Stylish and smooth swinging Rickie Fowler is a fan favorite. Winning the Masters would give him his first major.

9 Jason Day

It just seems like Jason Day is ready to wear a green jacket even though he didn't win a single tournament in 2017. After a combined eight victories in 2015 and 2016 and becoming No. 1 in the world, a bad back, injuries and his mother's cancer diagnosis held him back and he dropped out of the world top 10 in 2017.

With his mother seemingly healthy after lung cancer surgery, 2018 offers a fresh start. His best two finishes at Augusta were a while ago—he tied for second in 2011 and placed third in 2013. That 2011 finish was the only time Day broke 70 in the final round at Augusta. He said in 2017 that his mother's illness turned him away from the game, broke his concentration and stunted his desire. But a desirous Day is a dangerous Day. He's got all the tools for Augusta. If he uses them properly, he's going to be on the leaderboard.

8 Hideki Matsuyama

This man will become the first player from Japan to win a major championship and over the last three Masters his name has been on the classic Augusta leaderboard many times. His highest finish, in 2015, was fifth.

Matsuyama's distinctive swing, with the pause that refreshes at the top (à la Bob Murphy, but twice as powerful) seems suited to Augusta where his natural draw is the natural fit. And he always seems under control, even though he seems rather perplexed by

every shot he hits. One hand comes off the club and you think it's going miles wide of the green, only to end up 10 feet from the pin.

Matsuyama has five PGA Tour victories, two on the European Tour and will surely overtake Isao Aoki as Japan's most successful player. Aoki never won a major, losing a stretch battle for the 1980 U.S. Open title to playing partner Jack Nicklaus at Baltusrol. Matsuyama is a better ball striker, and is going to win one of those stretch battles.

7 Rory McIlroy

Picking McIlroy is a dicey prospect, but you can't rule out this prodigious talent. McIlroy, who has four major championships and only lacks the Masters for a career Grand Slam, failed to win anywhere in 2017 (well, he did get married). He was hampered by a rib injury that caused him to take considerable time off. Assuming that he's fully healthy, he then becomes fully viable as a Masters champion.

His best finish was fourth in 2015, but he is rather infamously known for blowing a third-round lead in 2011 by shooting an ignominious 80 in the final round. Let's just say it didn't sabotage his career. He romped in the U.S. Open that June for his first major. If he manages his prodigious length off the tee and his putting is fine-tuned, there's no way he shouldn't contend.

6 Rickie Fowler

He's a very popular player with a very nice Tour record, but upon closer examination Fowler has only won four times. In 2014 he finished fifth in the Masters and no worse than third in the other majors, seemingly a harbinger of great things to come. He's been a contender, but hasn't been able to close the deal.

Fowler has already shown that he's capable of playing Augusta National, though in his seven appearances he has shown a propensity to throw in one bad round a tournament. In 2016 that was an 80 in the first round that caused him to miss his only cut there.

At least two things will need to go his way to win his first major at the Masters—he will have to avoid big numbers and will have to putt better, especially the shorter ones where he has always been a little suspect. There may be no more popular winner if Fowler dons green.

5 Jon Rahm

We don't know yet how good this 23-year-old Spaniard is going to be. He came to Arizona State without speaking English. He left Arizona State speaking fluently and impressing everyone with his powerful, controlled game. ASU alumnus (and three-time Masters winner) Phil Mickelson, whose brother Tim coached the golf team, has no doubt about Rahm's future. "Jon doesn't have weaknesses," Mickelson said after Rahm won the Farmers last year. "Every part of his game is a strength. I think he's one of the best players in the world. There's an intangible that some guys have, where they want to have the pressure put on them, they want to be in that tough position. They want to have everything fall on their shoulders. He has that."

Rahm made his debut in the Masters last year, finishing 27th. There's no reason not to expect a higher finish and a green jacket fit for Rahm's wide shoulders.

4 Justin Thomas

The PGA Tour's 2017 player of the year was more than impressive—he was downright dominant. Thomas had five victories in the wraparound season, a 59 in the Sony Open last January, his first major at the PGA in August and a victory in the Tour playoffs at the Dell Technologies Championship in September.

He's only played the Masters the past two years, finishing tied for 22nd in 2017, but this is the tournament he relishes more than any other. It's the emotional component, the desire he will have to control. Thomas is a very aggressive player, and being aggressive at Augusta can pay off handsomely or drown dreams.

There's no doubt he has a complete game and drives it crazy long considering he's a mere 145 pounds. There's no doubt he's up for hitting the challenging shot. He hit three of them in the final round of the PGA, icing the victory with a magnificent 7-iron to the water-surrounded par-3 17th hole for birdie. Measure him for a green jacket. He'll eventually wear one.

3 Justin Rose

Justin Rose just looks like a winner. Last year he had a shot at his first green jacket, losing to Sergio Garcia in a playoff. In 2015 he tied with Phil Mickelson, finishing second to Jordan Spieth.

We know Rose has what it takes to win a major: after all, he pulled off a two-stroke victory at the 2013 U.S. Open at Merion, beating out Mickelson and Jason Day, becoming the first Englishman in 43 years to win that championship. He also has two victories in World Championship Golf events. Rose's journey from heralded amateur to struggling professional to top-10 player in the world is great testimony to the sort of fortitude the Masters demands. He has an impressively positive attitude that helps a lot when the vagaries of Augusta National start nipping at the scorecard.

He handled the playoff loss to Garcia last year with his usual class. He said if he had to lose, it was Garcia that he would prefer to lose to. Class generally pays off at the Masters.

Masters of the Masters

Eight men have won three or more Masters. Here's how we rank them.

8 Jimmy Demaret

1940, 1947, 1950

The first man to win three Masters championships. His 1940 victory capped a string of four consecutive tour wins by the game's original fashion plate.

7 Phil Mickelson

2004, 2006, 2010

One of only three players with a left-handed swing to win the Masters, Mickelson secured his first major title at Augusta by sinking an 18-foot birdie putt on the final hole.

6 Gary Player

1961, 1974, 1978

No man has played in more Masters than Player. His 52 starts have given him three victories. At age 62, he became the oldest player to make the cut (a record since broken).

5 Sam Snead

1949, 1952, 1954

Slammin' Sammy, who holds the record for most PGA Tour victories, won the Masters three times. He made history in 1949 when he was presented with the green jacket, the first time Augusta awarded this noteworthy prize.



Sam Snead (top) was the first winner to be draped in the green jacket. Jack Nicklaus (above) owns more than any other man.

4 Nick Faldo

1989, 1990, 1996

Sir Nick tasted victory at Augusta three times, and he's one of only three men to win consecutive Masters victories, along with Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus.

3 Arnold Palmer

1958, 1960, 1962, 1964

He won four times at Augusta, tying for second all time—and he did it in a mere six years. It was at Augusta National that a gallery of dedicated fans made up of servicemen would first be dubbed "Arnie's Army."

2 Tiger Woods

1997, 2001, 2002, 2005

The youngest player to win the Masters, 21-year-old Tiger Woods brought Augusta to its knees in 1997, setting records for biggest margin of victory (12 strokes) and lowest score. He owns four green jackets.

1 Jack Nicklaus

1963, 1965, 1966, 1972, 1975, 1986

The Golden Bear roared to life at the Masters, winning for the first time in 1963 at 23 years old. He holds the record for most Masters wins (six), has the most Top 10 finishes (22) and made a record 37 cuts. For added measure, his drama-packed 1986 victory at the age of 46 years, 82 days made him the oldest player ever to win the Masters—and filled middle-aged golf fans with dreams of beating their younger friends the next time they hit the links.

—David Savona



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With his spectacular drives and an improved short game, Dustin Johnson will come to Augusta ready to win his first green jacket and second major.

2 Jordan Spieth

As long as he plays, this young superstar will always rank among Masters favorites. With a magical short game and a maestro's putter, Augusta National will be his for the taking for a couple of decades to come. This tournament—and this golf course—have suited Spieth since he first played in 2014. In only four appearances, he has one victory (2015) two second-place finishes (2014 and 2016) and his 11th-place finish last year. He famously blew a five-stroke lead on the back nine on Sunday in 2016, hitting two balls in the water on the devilish par-3 12th for a quadruple bogey seven, but most of his Masters memories have been pleasant ones.

Spieth has a sneaky long driver. He isn't going to be outdriving Dustin Johnson, but he won't be too far behind him, and that means he can reach all of Augusta's par-5s in two. He should have a lot of two-putt birdies on them. And if he has to lay up, his wedges will get him close enough for birdie nearly every time.

Spieth already has one green jacket. There's a good chance he could eventually have an entire closet-full.

1 Dustin Johnson

Johnson lapped the field at the Sentry Tournament of Champions at the start of 2018, looks to be clearly the world's No. 1 player and ticks all the boxes when it comes to the attributes required for victory at Augusta National.

He came into last year's Masters as the betting favorite, having won three straight tournaments earlier in the season, then he slipped walking down stairs in his rental house, injured his back and had to withdraw just before his opening round. But a fully fit Johnson is a physical masterpiece, and he appears more than capable of painting a masterpiece at Augusta National. His best finish in seven appearances is fourth in 2016, but he's dramatically improved his short game over the last two seasons, and that will serve him extremely well.

Given that he is one of the longest drivers on the Tour (he nearly aced a 400-yard par-4 in January) his wedge play is critical to his success, especially when many other players will be hitting two or three clubs more into Augusta's perilous greens. Combine a big hit with a soft touch and that equals success at the Masters.



THE TIGER FACTOR

If Tiger Woods is as healthy as he looked at the start of his season, then his return to the Masters in April for the first time since 2015 is highly promising. This much can be said about his chances to win—you can't pick him and you can't ignore him.

In the three events he has played through the Honda Classic in February, the four-time Masters champion looked better than he has in the last four years, taking bold swipes at the ball like the Tiger of old and not the old Tiger. Back surgeries had short-circuited one of the all-time greats in his early 40s—he last won the Masters in 2005. Jack Nicklaus famously predicted when Woods was a teenage amateur phenom that he would win 10 Masters. It isn't going to happen.

He made the cut at the 2018 Farmers, his first cut on the PGA Tour in 29 months, finishing three under par and in a tie for 23rd. He missed the cut at the Genesis Open, then flirted with the leaderboard at the Honda Classic, where he drew massive galleries. He finished at even par and 12th on a very tough course. Importantly, Woods' short game seemed to be clicking, and that had been a big question mark the last four years.

There seems little doubt that a healthy Woods can win again. Pros who have played with Woods (Justin Thomas, Rickie Fowler and others) are impressed. He took enough outright slashes at the ball in the Hero World Challenge in December to suggest that some sort of mini-medical miracle has taken place. Now it's a question of getting tournament tuned.

His psychological fortitude is unparalleled, and there is no tougher player to face on the back nine on Sunday than Tiger Woods. That toughness seems to be there. He ground out his scores and seemed well grounded doing it.

We always keep our eyes on Woods. Now we'll keep our eyes on him at Augusta.

Cigars at Augusta

There's something about the bygone-era charm of Augusta National that makes smoking a cigar at the Masters a tradition unlike any other.

"Masters week is the equivalent of our entire Christmas season," says Russell Wilder, owner of Top Shelf Cigar in Augusta. Wilder grew up across the street from Augusta and his quaint shop and lounge enjoys a nice bump in business every first week of April.

Masters week accounts for nearly 12 percent of Top Shelf's annual cigar sales. Pro golf is one of the last cigar-friendly spectator sports, so many fans—whether they are regular smokers or not—take advantage of the rare opportunity with a cigar in hand. "We still get our fair share of seasoned cigar smokers in the shop," says Wilder. "But for other people who come in, it might be the only cigar they smoke all year."

Then there are Augusta's longtime tournament badge holders. These lucky folks have the pleasure of returning each year to indulge in their tradition of walking the storied grounds with a cigar. "I have customers who

have been coming in for 20 years," explains Marcella Perez, owner of Marcella's Fine Cigars & Tobaccos in Augusta. "They only come in once a year, but they always come back."

Marcella's is located just half a mile from the gates of Augusta National—certainly not a bad location for a cigar shop. Perez has even

had the opportunity to attend the Masters.

She went to the final round in 2014 and enjoyed a cigar while watching Bubba Watson don a green jacket for the second time. "Golf and cigars," she says in her unassuming southern drawl, "they just really go together."

—Blake Drosch



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The Green Jacket

It's certainly no fashion statement: a box-cut jacket with brass buttons and a pocket emblem, dyed in a color that bridges at pairing. Nevertheless the green jacket is the most coveted piece of apparel in the sports world. You can legitimately wear it in two ways: become one of the 300 or so members of Augusta National Golf Club or win the Masters, its annual tournament. Just in case either happens to you, it's best to brush up on some background and style tips.

At the 1937 Masters, club chairman Clifford Roberts made the uniform a fixture for members, who are expected to wear their jackets during the tournament to identify themselves to spectators seeking information. When hosting guests in the clubhouse, it also lets the waiters know who gets the check.

Should you win, the previous year's champion will help you into a close-fitting jacket borrowed from a member. (Beware: they blew it on Jack Nicklaus's first victory, and he looked like he was in a tent.) After the hoopla, you'll be measured for your own jacket, made by Hamilton Tailoring Co. in Cincinnati.

The jacket doesn't come with *carte blanche* to parade your golfing prowess. You keep it for a year, but are expected to wear it only at golf-related events. (Phil Mickelson's wearing his to a Krispy Kreme drive-through was frowned upon.) At the next Masters, you return your



jacket to the club, where it's kept in a special room. You log it out (and back in) when you visit. Gary Player got a stern phone call from Roberts when he kept his too long.

The uniform hasn't always been uniform. The original heavyweight-wool, hopsack version proved too steamy. Subsequent makers lightened the cloth, and, in the 1990s, Hamilton settled on a wool/poly blend from a Georgia mill. The buttons are stamped in Connecticut, and the emblem made in North Carolina. Those who wish to splurge can turn to Henry Poole, of London's Savile Row, who custom makes jackets using wool serge from a Yorkshire mill. You'll get working sleeve buttonholes and the option for extra room to hide accessories like a cell phone or a

cigar case. But don't expect to dictate the design. The uniform is strictly a three-button (remember, only button at the middle), natural-fit jacket with notch lapels, flap pockets and a single vent.

Accessorizing with the jacket's color can be as challenging as Augusta's greens. It's a teal-like shade described as Pantone No. 342. If you're wearing a green tie, be careful to match precisely. Dark blue stripes may be a better option. Khaki pants will appear muddy, so go lighter or pick black or dark blue.

Of course, there is another path to a green jacket—buying one. Green Auctions sold the one awarded to the first Masters winner, Horton Smith, for \$682,229 in 2013.

—Jack Bettridge

THE LONG SHOTS

Xander Schauffele

Nothing heralded Schauffele's extraordinary rise in 2017. He tied for fifth in the U.S. Open, won the Greenbrier in July, the Tour Championship in September and was rookie of the year. This will be his first Masters.

Brooks Koepka

The reigning U.S. Open champion put on a virtuoso performance at Erin Hills in 2017, driving it long and straight, hitting plenty of greens and making birdie putts, a game that could translate to Augusta. Last year, at his third Masters, he played the par-5s in 10 under.

Marc Leishman

Leishman was a first round co-leader at the 2013 Masters, eventually posting his best-ever finish of fourth. His most impressive

major was the 2015 Open Championship at St Andrews where he shot 64-66 to make the playoff with winner Zach Johnson and Louie Oosthuizen. Today he is playing at his best.

Brian Harman

Harman's 5-7, 150-pound frame doesn't match up to some of the physical specimens he's facing, but he's overcome a lot to get to where he is in the game. And he knows the heat of a Sunday major, shooting 72 in the final round of the U.S. Open last year to finish tied for second. Harman has one appearance in the Masters.

Pat Perez

By mid-2016, Perez had only one victory since turning pro in 1997, and after shoulder surgery, he was wondering if he would even have a career. Now, with two recent victories, he's playing the best golf of his life and has a top-20 ranking. Maybe, just maybe. ♦

Jeff Williams is a CIGAR AFICIONADO contributing editor.



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BY PAUL A. EISENSTEIN





Bugatti Chiron



Hennessey claims the 1,600 horses under the hood of its Venom F5 can take it to 301 mph, which would make it the fastest street-legal car in the world.

THE CLOSEST THING I CAN IMAGINE WOULD BE STRAPPING MYSELF INTO AN FA-18 FOR THE THRILL OF A CATAPULT LAUNCH OFF A NAVY CARRIER.

Instead, I've slipped into the new Bugatti Chiron, belted up and given my co-driver the thumbs up. This time, I'm only along for the ride. At \$2.7 million a pop, I can't argue when it's "suggested" I first take a check ride to feel what it's like when a 1,500-horsepower coupe takes off in anger down a nearly three-mile straight. So, after firing the beast up and running through a checklist a pilot might admire, he gives me back the thumbs-up, revs the engine a couple times, slips the transmission into gear and hits the throttle.

Carrier launches can generate 6Gs or more—that is, six times the force of gravity—and without specially designed pressure suits pilots would black out. The Chiron can only deliver a 1G launch but that's still enough to drain the blood from my eyes as I sink deep into the Bugatti's heavily bolstered sports seat. By the time I can focus again and turn to check out the speedometer we've already blasted through 60. It took a mere 2.4 seconds, and four seconds later we've topped 125. But the Bugatti keeps on pulling, topping 200 mph in barely 15 seconds. We've already used up a fair amount of pavement, so the driver decides to back down before quite reaching the 250 mark.

The recently introduced successor to the spaceship-like Bugatti Veyron lays claim to being the world's fastest street-legal

production automobile, though it faces some surprisingly intense competition for that crown from an expanding array of products like the American-made Hennessey Venom F5 and Sweden's Koenigsegg Agera RS.

They're all street legal, albeit with price tags that only a one-percentor might consider. Churning out horsepower numbers that push well above 1,000, they make more familiar muscle and sports cars, whether the sleek, 640-hp Ferrari 488 GTB or the bally 840-hp Dodge Challenger SRT Demon, seem tame. Indeed, they are so powerful and blindingly fast that they require the unique sobriquet of "hypercars." Exactly what that means, however, is a matter of debate.

From the days of the very first automobile, buyers have been craving more power and performance. "The fascination for high speed has lost none of its appeal to this day," read a statement from Daimler AG earlier this year, marking the 80th anniversary of race driver Rudolf Caracciola's record 268.9 mph run down a stretch of Autobahn near Frankfurt. He drove a specially modified Mercedes-Benz race car. Even the most exotic vehicles available to consumers of the 1930s could barely top 100. It wasn't until the 1950s that products like the Jaguar XK120 and the Mercedes Gullwing SL made triple-digit runs possible on a routine basis.

While it might not be the first brand to come to mind, some experts credit Ford with coming up with the first true supercar, a street-legal version of the GT40 race car that it designed specifically to take down Ferrari at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, which it won from 1966 to 1969. The production version, introduced in 2004 as simply the GT, made what seemed almost impossible at the time, a whopping 335 horsepower and 336 pound-feet of torque. It could hit 60 in just 5.1 seconds and topped out at 172 mph.

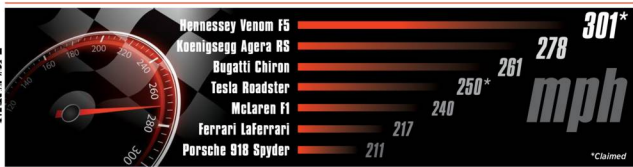
Today, any number of vehicles lay claim to being a “supercar,” a term that actually dates back to the 1920s. An ad for the Ensign 6, a behemoth meant to challenge the likes of Bentley and Rolls-Royce, declared the sedan to be “The supreme development of the British super-car.” Today, the Collins English Dictionary describes supercar as, “a very expensive, fast or powerful car with a centrally located engine,” a definition that can cover a lot of territory, including familiar models like the Porsche 911 Turbo and pretty much anything from Lamborghini or Ferrari. But hypercars take things “to the next stage,” says Don Sherman, a long-time racer and a veteran reporter for *Car and Driver* magazine. “They’ve got even more power, less weight, more technology and a lot more performance.” If you want something more definitive, he suggests, “It’s gotta go 250 mph, certainly well over 200, which has become almost commonplace these days.”

No car fit that definition better than the Bugatti Veyron.

Vitesse model which captured a Guinness world record for street legal cars with a top speed of 267.856 mph. The roadster version hit an average 254.03 mph during testing in April 2013.

After taking an order for the 500th Veyron, Bugatti officially ended the production run in late 2014. But it wasn’t about to close up shop, unveiling a successor model, the Chiron. By then, the race was on and a growing list of worthy competitors has since thrown down the gauntlet hoping to best Bugatti at its own game. The numbers have grown ever larger and faster, with the Hennessey Venom F5 rated around 1,600 hp. But for those who think even that—and a top claimed speed of 301 mph—just doesn’t cut it, a small, Mideast-based start-up may finally be pushing the upper limits. Making its debut at the Dubai Motor Show last November, the appropriately named Devel Sixteen is claimed to deliver a jaw-dropping and neck-snapping 5,000 horsepower from its own, quad-turbo, 16-cylinder engine. Devel promises the two-seater will top out somewhere around 310 mph—albeit without any official test runs. And it can be yours for \$1.8 million, a relative bargain in today’s hypercar class.

Plenty of skeptics question whether Devel can deliver on its claims, something we may not know for another year or two. But one thing seems certain: with new billionaires being minted every day, there’s plenty of money out there to support the hypercar industry. And some intriguing new technology that change the way the game is played.



Long, low and sleek, it featured the sort of outrageous design that might have seemed more appropriate on the set of a sci-fi flick. The Veyron EB 16.4 was unveiled in 2000 and marked the revival of the legendary brand founded by legendary designer Ettore Bugatti nearly a century before. (Volkswagen AG purchased it in 1998 as part of a campaign to dominate the extreme luxury and performance market. Other examples of such VW acquisitions include Bentley, Lamborghini and, more recently, Porsche.)

With its unusual, quad-turbo, W-16 engine—referenced by the 16.4 in its name—Bugatti boasted that the Veyron would become the first-ever, street-legal, factory-produced vehicle to deliver 1,000 horsepower. The concept was so bold that the BBC declared it “Car of the Decade” before the first one even rolled out of the factory in 2011. The original version set a top speed of 253 mph, but Bugatti engineers weren’t done yet. They steadily amped up the 16-cylinder power plant, capping their efforts with the Veyron Grand Sport

With the launch of the Tesla Model S, the Silicon Valley automaker showed that electric cars don’t have to be slow and ponderous. With its optional Ludicrous Mode, the Model S P100D edition can match the Bugatti Veyron’s 0-to-60 times. Then there’s Rimac, a Croatian start-up whose Concept One is not only being billed as the world’s fastest electric vehicle but a hypercar in its own right, making 1,224 horsepower and capable of hitting 60 in a mere 2.4 seconds. Meanwhile, late last year Tesla CEO and founder Elon Musk unveiled the company’s second-generation Roadster, declaring his intent to “give a hardcore smackdown” to vehicles running on internal combustion engines. It will create a mind-boggling 10,000 pound-feet of tire-spinning torque, he promises, and will hit a top speed of 250 mph. How far it will get on a full charge at that speed, well, Musk isn’t saying. But speed is the enemy of energy-efficiency for any fuel type. In a flat-out run, the Bugatti Veyron would empty its 26-gallon gas tank in just 12 minutes.



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Here's a brief look at the latest crop of hypercars

Aston Martin Valkyrie

Unveiled at the 2017 Geneva Motor Show and still a ways from production, the British sports carmaker's first true hypercar is being developed in cooperation with its track partner, Red Bull Racing. Both the street-legal and track versions will be produced in very limited numbers. The ultralight, monocoque-design two-seater will use a mid-engine 6.5-liter Cosworth engine expected to make "at least 1,000 horsepower."

Bugatti Chiron

While the Chiron picks up on key styling cues of the brand's previous exotic, the Veyron, it is anything but a "carryover." A closer look reveals significant updates made to ensure that Chiron can deliver a whopping 25 percent more power than the old Bugatti Grand Sport Vitesse, something that should help it regain a number of world records, including power, torque and top speed. Surprisingly, getting 1,500 horsepower and 1,180 pound-feet of torque out of the Chiron's 8.0-liter quad-turbo W-16 engine was less of a challenge than keeping brakes and powertrain cooled at 260+ mph.

Chevrolet Corvette ZR1

A Chevy? Well, that's a matter of debate because the latest version of the seventh-generation 'Vette retains its up-front engine placement. Nevertheless, it delivers what GM calls "unprecedented performance." Its supercharged 6.2-liter LT5 V-8 churns out a



solid 755 hp and 715 pound-feet of torque, and it can clip 60 in barely two seconds, with a top speed of around 216 mph. What the automotive world is really watching for, however, is the long-awaited mid-engine Corvette caught by "spy" photographers while it was tested at places like Germany's Nürburgring.

Ferrari LaFerrari and FXX

Only this Italian automaker would name its first hypercar after itself. The LaFerrari was more than just fast and exotic. It introduced the world to the idea you could make a green (well, greener) hypercar using a Formula One-derived hybrid system that combines a 6.2-liter V-12 and 120-kilowatt electric motor that recaptures energy during braking and coasting. Now comes the successor, the FXX-K Evo. Built in extremely limited numbers, this four-wheeled arrow of a hypercar also borrows heavily from F1 for both its aerodynamics and powertrain technology—the hybrid engine package rated at 1,036 hp.

Ford GT

The successor to the original Ford GT40 was, like the '60s-era hypercar, initially designed for the racetrack—dominating its class in the global endurance series for the last two years. Fittingly, only 250 will be built in the initial run, an upgraded version to follow with equal numbers. Some, however, might quibble about whether the GT deserves to be called a hypercar. It makes only 647 hp, and its twin-turbo 3.5-liter engine has but six cylinders. However, due to its lightweight construction it boasts one of the highest power-to-weight ratios of any street-legal performance car ever built.

Hennessey Venom F5

This American-born hypercar could soon not only capture the world speed record, but become the first production model to break 300 mph. No wonder it's named for the most powerful tornado on the Fujita scale. The limited-edition F5 uses a Hennessey-designed V-8 that makes 1,600 horsepower. But power isn't everything. With its carbon-fiber body it weighs just 2,950 pounds and wind-tunnel testing has helped minimize drag while maximizing the down force needed to stay on the ground at such extreme speeds.





Koenigsegg Agera RS

Starting with the "One," this Swedish marque has rolled out a series of hyper-exotic machines that have challenged far more established ultra-performance brands like Ferrari, Lamborghini and McLaren. The Agera RS, in fact, claims a slightly higher top speed than the new Bugatti Chiron, at 278 mph, and there have been hints from the company that it could yet push to 300, challenging Hennessey's Venom F5. Oh, and it can reach 250 mph in a mere 33 seconds.

Lamborghini Huracán Performante

When it comes to outlandish designs, few can come close to matching what Lamborghini routinely rolls out. And even its most mundane models deliver inspiring levels of performance. But the Performante clearly pushes the envelope with a car that can stand on its own on both the drag strip and on a more conventional race circuit. It will turn a quarter mile in a mere 10.4 seconds and it has lapped the grueling Nürburgring Nordschleife in just six minutes 52.1 seconds, a production car record.

McLaren P1 and XX

Claiming more F1 victories than any other manufacturer, the British carmaker was one of the first to push into hypercar territory with the exotic and unusual F1. It followed with the P1 earlier this decade and is now readying the \$1 million Senna, named for Formula One legend Ayrton Senna. (He spent six years under the McLaren flag, winning 35 races and taking three world championships.) With its distinctive gullwing doors and ultralight carbon fiber chassis and body, it will be powered by a 780 hp twin-turbo V-8.

Mercedes-AMG Project One

After a long wait, we've finally gotten our first official look at the German marque's first true hypercar. A major step beyond the earlier SLR and SLS supercars, the Project One's specs might seem like a typo: it uses a miniscule 1.6-liter turbo-charged engine, but one that can spin at 11,000 RPMs. And



it's paired with four electric motors that, all combined, thrust out over 1,000 horsepower with essentially no turbo lag. It even promises 25 miles in all-electric mode, as well as a 217 mph top speed.

Porsche 918 Spyder and Mission E

The 918 Spyder was a breakthrough model for Porsche in a variety of ways, among other things marking the first time the German sports car company opted for a hybrid drivetrain, one using Formula One technology. The mid-engine plug-in could even drive 19 miles in all-electric mode. The automaker will next year launch its first all-electric model, the Mission E. And though it won't fall into the hypercar category it's expected to deliver performance in line with some of Porsche's fastest models.

Tesla Roadster

We haven't gotten much from Tesla yet on the second-generation Roadster. It's focused, for now, on figuring out how to fix production problems with its new Model 3. But during an autumn 2017 sneak preview, Musk set hearts aflutter by showing off a prototype that, he claimed, will make an awe-inspiring 10,000 pound-feet of torque, hit 60 in barely two seconds and top out somewhere in the 250 mph range. Want one of the first? Tesla is taking advance orders for a \$200,000 deposit. ♦

Paul A. Eisenstein writes frequently on cars for CIGAR AFICIONADO.

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small games, big money

by Michael Kaplan • illustration by Taylor Gallery

Eddie Teams has taken an astonishing amount of cash from minor casino games most top gamblers ignore

A guy texts to tell me that he has a 33 percent chance of winning a car in a casino. I consider it for a beat and write it off as wishful thinking. A similar message comes from Eddie Teams and I figure that he's come across a favorable situation and has high probability of parking a new auto in his driveway during the coming days.

Teams, in his forties, has won more than 30 cars from casinos across the United States. He is a canny advantage player who games casino promotions aimed at prolific gamblers and capitalizes on the miscalculations of sucker bets. A mathematical approach—based on cost versus opportunity of various propositions—has led him to win a house in Pahrump, Nevada, to take down raffle-card drawings as if by magic, to devise gambits for beating bookies even if he knows nothing about the sporting event. At first glance, Teams appears to be the luckiest guy in Nevada. In reality, he ranks among the hardest working.

Understandably, Teams gets irked when people talk about common games being unbeatable.

Walking through Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino, formerly the Hilton, out of which Teams and his crew of advantage players have extracted many thousands of dollars, he simply states: "Every casino game in the world is beatable, and it can all be done without breaking any laws. There are biased roulette wheels. Side bets at every table game are beatable. I've memorized shuffles, recognized card-backs, sequenced aces, controlled dice."

And for anyone who thinks slot machines, video poker and electronic blackjack games rank as sucker bets, Teams has big news: They're not. In fact, they have long been his bread and butter. His millions of dollars in earnings at those gambling devices, often considered the province of people who are old, clueless or timid, underscore the point. Amazingly, while Teams knows the math of the wagers he makes, there are times when simply paying laser-sharp attention is enough to carry the day.

Consider what went down at a casino in Arizona. "I won \$150,000 in two months," recalls Teams. "Whoever got in the most slot play, within a designated period of time, would be called first to pick from five large poster cards on a wall."

Their fronts, with varying amounts of money, faced the wall and were positioned out of players' sights, but the backs, of course, were visible. "One was \$50,000 and the others were \$10,000," Teams says. "You had to lose so much on the slots [in order to have enough play to participate] that winning \$10,000 was not very good. But if you hit \$50,000, it was a nice profit. The first drawing, I won \$10,000 and saw a guy win the \$50,000. I committed the back of the \$50,000 card to memory. I knew they'd use the same cards the next time and knew I'd be able to recognize it just like you recognize your cell phone," he says, referring to tiny, almost imperceptible scratches and imperfections. "Then I came back, played enough so that I would be first to pick, and hit it. I did that three times—before they brought in new cards with clean backs and I couldn't do it anymore."

At the Vegas Hard Rock, for a similar contest, after Teams won by the same means, casino management tried foiling him by making sure the card backs were 100 percent identical. "Then I saw a guy placing the cards on a board for players to pick," says Teams, who realized that the casino employee knew where the high-paying card was. "Thirty minutes before the contest, I found a penny slot machine that gave me a view of him setting things up. I played the machine and watched this guy's eyes. He kept looking at the winning card. Whether he wanted to or not, he couldn't help himself. I knew with nearly 100 percent certainty where the big-money card had been placed and won again."

There's also a way to buy the world's fanciest wristwatches without paying anything close to the going price, so long as you move in the same circles that Teams does. He wears a handsome Audemars Piguet. "It's a \$40,000 watch," he says with no hesitation. "But I paid \$17,000. You can say that I'm a bit of a pawnbroker. I have \$1 million worth of watches."

Like most good things that have happened to Teams, this side career began in a casino. Back in 2003, he was playing every day at Mohegan Sun Casino in Connecticut, but he wasn't gambling it up at blackjack or Texas hold'em. Teams found his edge on a video poker machine called Pick'em Poker. "It was boring," he



says. "So boring that I sometimes had to play a higher risk machine just to relieve the tedium."

The results, though, were anything but boring. Played correctly, Pick'em Poker was close to a break-even machine. Mohegan Sun, in an effort to induce play from seeming suckers, gave enough comp dollars for machine-play that Teams earned some \$300 an hour. But it wasn't cash. What Teams made were credits that could be spent at Mohegan's retail outlets. "I worked out a private deal with the owner of a store in the casino," he says. "He sold me gold coins, which I went on to sell. They came with a nice loophole." A loophole he preferred to not get into.

Leading me to the Westgate steakhouse, Teams continues: "I had more coin-in and more *theoretical* loss than anyone in the casino," he says, emphasizing the word *theoretical* and making it clear that he did anything but lose. "I spent so much time in the high-limit room that degenerate gamblers there started talking to me. Eventually some of them asked to borrow money. They were always broke and gave me their watches for collateral. Some guys sold me their comp dollars and that was fine as well."

The watch he's currently sporting? "I did the deal for this one in Vegas. I was at the Caesars Palace sports book. A guy called me and said he needed money. I told him to meet me at Caesars and to bring the watch. Games were going off and I didn't want to miss them."

Sitting down at a table in the steakhouse (the meal is comped, of course), Teams is sipping a glass of single-malt Scotch and waiting for one of his partners to join us. He explains that things started for him on a car lot in Hawaii. His father was in the military; Teams was 18 and landed a job working for an auto dealer in Oahu. At the time, he did not know how to drive a stick and turned out to be terrible at selling cars. The boss offered Teams two options: Get fired or relocate to a sister dealership where a manager was particularly adept at training rookie salesmen.

Teams chose the latter. The trainer was named Eddie Suzui. "It was intense," recalls Teams. "He went into mirror greeting techniques, showed me how to read people's lips and eyes, taught me strategies for recognizing when people are lying or willing to accept a price. I learned a lot and became very good. I wound up in Vegas and thought I would get a job selling cars there while I worked on card counting—something that I had been interested in ever since I saw the movie *Rain Man* in 1988. One day I was out on the lot, the temperature hit 115 degrees, I felt miserable. I had already gotten ahead by \$20,000 playing double-deck [blackjack games] and spreading from \$25 to \$200. I quit my job and began playing full time."

Adding to his advantage-playing repertoire, he got into shuffle tracking and hole-carding. For the former, Teams taught himself to memorize slugs of cards by making up stories with each card representing a different character in the story. Marilyn Monroe, for example, was the Queen of diamonds. For the latter, he'd spot dealers' hole cards and send info to a partner who would do the betting. To see the cards, though, Teams explains, "I'd get down really low in my seat. I began wearing kneepads under my pants and that helped take care of the pain."

After getting backed off for card-counting at a low-stakes blackjack game in an off-strip casino—"I split 10s four times, won all the hands and the pit-boss told me I couldn't play blackjack anymore because he was too busy to watch me"—Teams saw that video poker expert Bob Dancer was holding classes on the game in the casino. Dancer is a well-regarded advantage player and he gave legitimately good advice, but the casino knew that few people would follow his wisdom and, empowered by the class, they'd feel emboldened to risk money. Teams turned out to be one of the few who actually listened. More importantly, he was drawn by Dancer's coupons for double-payments on royal flushes.

All you had to do was sit through the entire class and, if you

"Every casino game in the world is beatable, and it can all be done without breaking any laws."

—EDDIE TEAMS

played perfectly, the coupons gave you a 2.7 percent advantage. (For comparison's sake, card-counting pays off at 1 to 2 percent and gets you kicked out of casinos a lot quicker.) Dancer put on two classes per day, Teams religiously attended both of them and exploited the coupons. Dancer finally took him aside and warned him to take it easy on doubling up or else the casino would back him off from video poker. He listened, found other opportunities and came to recognize that money was not made only from hitting straights and flushes on the screen. You could also get rich by playing the right machines and capitalizing on bonuses, cash-back offers, free-play coupons and various drawings designed to attract losing players.

As Teams unspools his story, a playing partner by the name of Dave Miller, in his thirties and a marathon-racing fanatic, joins us at the dinner table. We put in our food orders and he compels Teams to tell me about a recent play.

It was at Resorts World Casino in Queens, a gambling den that offers only machines and no table games. The casino had an offer for gamblers who played enough of the casino's electronic games in a single day, entitling them to receive \$8,000 in free play divided over the next three months. The problem was that you could put in for the payments only once every three months. On the upside, players were able to satisfy the play requirement at an expected loss of around \$500, and the coupons were redeemable at kiosks inside the casino, as opposed to being mailed to a local address.

Knowing the particulars, Teams realized that he needed as many players cards as possible. "All we needed were cards and pin numbers," he explains. "My girlfriend is from Laos, and she seemed to know every Laoation grandmother in New York. We rented a van, brought them to the casino, paid them \$300 each for getting players cards, then played on the cards and cashed in for the free play."

One challenge was getting the coupons at the kiosks. Casinos have cameras everywhere and management does not take kindly to people who play under multiple cards to seriously monetize

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the promotion. Teams did a literal headcount and noticed that one in four men at Resorts World wore Yankees hats. So everybody on the crew became instantly indistinguishable by wearing a home-team cap. Miller took it a step further. "I would bring in two cards at a time and keep coming back with different looks," he says. "I'd wear a hoodie. Then I'd return with a baseball hat. Then there'd be a tee shirt or a windbreaker or a suit."

Things got busy enough that Teams felt the need to recruit non-professional gamblers for obtaining the coupons. At least one of them, who had a day job as an engineer, found it hard to believe

"Casinos and lawyers can say a game is completely unbeatable, but, when you think about it, that is crazy logic."
—EDDIE TEAMS

that he could be made so easily. "This guy went in and just stood there with 50 cards, cashing one after the other into the kiosk," Miller recounts with a rueful tone. "They caught him. He got taken into a backroom, was threatened with arrest and got read the trespass act. He came to my hotel room and was devastated."

Though annoyed at the time, Teams shrugs it off now: "He's got a regular job and is not used to that stuff. I've been in that situation so many times that I don't care. Still, 26 of our accounts got frozen and that was the end of it. It lasted two-and-a-half months. If the engineer hadn't gotten us shut down, we could have made more than \$800,000."

When asked how much he made, Teams smiles tightly and replies: "I don't recall."

The waiter sets down prime beef and the usual steakhouse sides. As we dig into dinner, Miller explains that all casino personnel are not as rough as the people at Resorts World. Others, in fact, are surprisingly good sports. He remembers a particularly juicy promotion at the Plaza Hotel & Casino in downtown Vegas. The deal was that anytime you hit a payoff for \$1,200 or more, which is taxed at 28 percent, the casino would provide a 30 percent bonus.

Ridiculously profitable for sharp players, it was scheduled to go for 24 hours, from midnight to midnight. "We were 18 hours in when a casually dressed guy, in his thirties, with a British accent, walked up and started asking questions," remembers Miller. "He asked how we got there, how we heard about the promotion, how we were doing with it. Then he leaned into me and said, 'I really screwed up with this promotion, didn't I?' I realized that he's the owner of the casino!"

"My heart started racing. I said, 'To be honest, this is pretty good for players.' Then he softly asked, 'How bad will this be for me?' I'll keep the promotion going until midnight, as promised, but just tell me what the damage will be.' I told him that it will

probably be around \$200,000 per machine. He absorbed the news and said, 'Well, you have to lose sometimes.' Then he gave us his business card and kept it going until midnight. In retrospect, it was hilarious."

They get on a roll and Teams talks about the time he got locked inside a casino restaurant with a lucrative blackjack machine. He and his crew could have stayed there all night if not for a homeless guy inadvertently locked in with them who kept kicking at the door trying to get out.

Miller talks about a bingo game he used to burn off a load of freepay points for a windfall of \$300,000 and a progressive video poker machine at the Palms that had to pay off at \$25,000. "It got up to \$24,000," says Miller. "I had to play it for hours longer, but leaving at that point would have been a mathematical catastrophe."

Rounding things out, they are deep into sports betting. Here's an easy tip from Teams: If an NFL underdog is ahead by a lot at the half, against a public outfit like the Patriots or Cowboys, make a half-time bet on the dog to cover the spread. Teams has been applying advantage-playing strategies to the trading of futures and cryptocurrencies. He's been doing well with it and hopes to find outside investors. One stock play he missed, though, unspooled at a major, publicly traded casino back in 2008, before he was seriously trading, when shares of its parent company were below \$2. The struggling casino company, desperate to generate immediate revenue, announced that players would receive four-times bonus points, which could be turned into free play. It was so valuable that when a gambler was told he would have to move his car, he asked that they tow it, lest he step away from the machine and lose valuable time in front of it.

The promotion was supposed to go for a day and got extended to last a week. It generated casino cashflow that succeeded in propping up the stock. While Teams, Miller and others experienced serious windfalls—"I made over \$1 million that year," says Teams—they missed out on the biggest advantage play of all by failing to listen to casino personnel that they viewed as skills.

Remembers Miller: "A man in a suit walked up to us and said, 'I know what you guys are doing. We're fine with it. But the best thing you can do for your future is to go out and put some of your money into this casino's stock.' My mentality at the time was to keep playing and not worry about anything else. People thought he was biased and I didn't know if it was a huge opportunity or not." One woman, however, did: "She put \$100,000 into the stock and it went from a dollar to \$18. That was very good for her."

As for the future, Miller has a plan: "Being unbeatable at sports, finding opportunities with machines, making endless money."

Maybe taking in the bigger picture a bit, Teams steps back a notch and says, "Casinos and lawyers can say a game is completely unbeatable, but, when you think about it, that is crazy logic. It may be incredibly complicated, but there will inevitably be a way to beat it."

Then, with dinner completed and plates being cleared, Teams scrutinizes the tab and realizes that his comp is not quite exhausted. He flags the waiter and orders an entire cheesecake to go. Clearly, leaving money on the table resides outside his frame of reference. ❖

Michael Kaplan is a CIGAR AFICIONADO contributing editor.

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Getting Your Irish Up

Get to know supremely smooth Irish whiskey, a spirits category with more choices than you think

By Jack Beltridge

Advice to whiskey snobs: If it's St. Patrick's Day and you're in a bar (and what are the chances of that?) don't turn down an Irish whiskey on the premise there isn't much choice. First of all, you'd be missing out on a rapidly expanding category that recalls a time when the island nation could claim to make the world's preeminent whiskey. Second, it could get you cold-cocked. Better just to go with the flow and enjoy one of the many excellent drams that are the gift of the rebirth of Irish whiskey.

If you think of Irish as a supremely smooth blend meant to bolster a mug of coffee, you're only partially right. The Emerald Island has a spirits heritage that stretches back a millennium and a half (depending on whom you ask) and includes quite a flavor panorama, with many whiskeys better suited to sipping neat or with a rock than poured into coffee. The whims of history have not always been kind to the whiskey culture in Ireland, and there are a

number of myths about the spirit: that Irish whiskey is all triple-distilled, unpeated and blended. Let us set the record straight.

Whiskey has been made in Ireland for at least 400 years, and perhaps more than 1,000. Based on a written record from 1495, the Scots claim that their whiskey predates Irish, but reason suggests that may not be the case. Distillation equipment (for perfume) could be found in Ireland as early as 600 A.D., back when a mere 200 million people walked the Earth, so it tries the imagination to think that the Irish neglected to make whiskey with it for nine centuries. By the end of the 18th century a couple thousand stills existed in Ireland. Many were tiny, cottage affairs.

Unlike much of today's Irish whiskey, back in those days the spirit was quite smoky, and made with plenty of peat, both to dry barley or fuel the stills, as peat was so widely available on an island known for its bogs. When Dublin became the distilling capital of the 18th century, coal edged out peat as a fuel source, taking away some of the smoky qualities of many Irish whiskeys.

Today Connemara, from the Cooley distillery, has revived the art of making peated whiskey on the Emerald Isle, offering a smoky taste of Ireland's past.

A 1785 tax on barley can be credited with giving Irish whiskey some of its distinctive, modern-day flavor. The tariff was more onerous on malted barley than unmalted, so distillers in search of a tax deduction mixed in a portion of unsprouted barley with their usual malt. The serendipity of the dodge was that the addition of green barley gave the whiskey a spicier, fruitier taste, a flavor now so closely associated with whiskey from Ireland. Irish whiskey made solely from malted barley virtually disappeared.

Distilling in Ireland was originally done exclusively in pot stills, so the blended whiskey that Ireland is now associated with had yet to exist. The use of a more efficient (and profitable) column still to make some of the whiskey in a vatting is what constitutes

enough, the Second World War severely cut grain supplies.

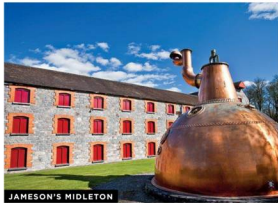
The industry's reaction to the slowdown was to consolidate, and by 1966 all whiskey makers in the Republic of Ireland, including such venerable brands as Jameson, Powers, Middleton and Paddy, had merged into Irish Distillers Ltd. By 1975 Dublin ceased to make whiskey, and all distillation in the country moved to the new Middleton plant on the south end of the island. The Old Bushmills distillery in Northern Ireland was swept up into the group in 1970. Irish Distillers was sold to France's Pernod Ricard in 1988. Bushmills has since been sold and resold and belongs to José Cuervo. The Paddy brand now belongs to America's Sazerac.

Happily, the story improves from there. John Teeling, a seventh-generation distiller, was already converting a Schnapps distillery in County Louth, near Northern Ireland, to make whiskey and by 1987 had founded Cooley Distillery. He immediately



blending. Aeneas Coffey, an Irishman himself, patented this continuous method of distilling in 1830, but the island did not fully embrace column still grain whiskey until the 20th century.

Irish whiskey fell into slow decline 100 years ago. The island's separatist movement had been clashing with Great Britain for a half century before Ireland was granted independence in 1921. A British trade embargo, which had already been instituted in 1919, meant that Irish distillers (with the exception of Northern Ireland producers, like Bushmills) could no longer distribute to the United Kingdom and its considerable territories worldwide. The trouble was whipsawed by the introduction of Prohibition in the United States, a lively market with no shortage of Irish immigrants. Canada, a convenient neighbor, flooded the U.S. with well-made contraband that would supersede Irish on the American palate. A cap on exports by Ireland's new government meant that when Prohibition ended in 1933, Ireland was ill prepared to recapture the American market. If those weren't problems



began reviving old brands and styles, which now include single malt, single grain, blended whiskey and the peated Connemara.

The rebounding interest in whiskey in general and the resurgence of Irish whiskey (especially Jameson) has made the United States Ireland's most important global market, accounting for 40 percent of sales. New brands are swelling the market and at least 18 new distilleries have opened in the past five years, with a dozen more planned. Tullamore D.E.W. recently returned to its former hometown with a new distillery. The once-shuttered Kilbeggan Distillery in County Westmeath was restored years ago and distillation has restarted. (It's also a popular spot for tours.) In 2015, the sons of John Teeling, Jack and Stephen, returned distilling to Ireland's capital of Dublin with their own facility on Newmarket, in the heart of Dublin's old whiskey-making district.

With the big name distillers continuing to up their game with exciting new releases, it's a good time to get your Irish up with some of these fine whiskeys.

Coffee's Greatest COCKTAIL

We can safely assume that self-styled mixologists have been adding whiskey to their coffee ever since the two were available in one place, but the foremost java cocktail was not codified until the age of commercial transatlantic flight. The story goes that in 1943, bad weather forced a Pan Am flying boat on its way to New York back to Ireland and the passengers were given Irish whiskey, coffee and a topping of cream to keep them warm.

It wasn't long before the drink flew international. The mellow, caramel of Irish whiskey softens the acidic coffee. The sugar in the mix makes the cream buoyant, and the combination comes together as the dark lower layer is drunk through the light floater. The result is one of our favorite drinks, a simple cocktail that pairs oh-so-well with a bracing cigar.



IRISH COFFEE

4 oz black coffee
2 oz Irish whiskey
1½ oz heavy cream
1 tsp (or to taste) brown sugar

Heat a goblet or glass mug in hot water. Whisk the cream to a light thickness (you'll have to pour it later). Mix coffee, whiskey and sugar in the glass. Pour cream over an inverted spoon to float on top.

Bushmills 16-Year-Old Single Malt (80 proof, \$80) This Northern Ireland distillery makes nothing but single malt in pot stills (column-stilled grain whiskey is procured elsewhere for its blends). The 16-year-old single malt is aged in Sherry and Bourbon casks before being joined in Port wood for a number of months. The result is a beguiling mix, delicate and bold with cherry, caramel, toffee, honey and spice.

Connemara Peated Single Malt Whiskey (40 proof, \$55) Currently unique among Irish whiskeys for its smoky, peat flavor, Connemara still shows a range of fruit, including pear, as well as toast and licorice. Twice pot-distilled, instead of the three times common to Ireland, it has a full body and maltiness.

Jameson Blender's Dog (86 proof, \$70) The second in the Whiskey Makers Series highlights the important art of blending, especially considering the extensive stock held in the Midleton distillery that makes Jameson. Named for a tool used to draw samples, it melds different ages and styles to come up with a nuanced flavor spectrum that includes orange, lime, cocoa and banana.

Kilbeggan Single Grain (86 proof, \$30) Single grain refers to a whiskey made in a column still at a single location (in this case, Cooley Distillery). With a recipe that is almost exclusively corn (it's only 6 percent barley), this Kilbeggan would normally be part of a blend. It stands on its own, however, with the expected vanilla and honey, plus some understated herbs and spice.

Redbreast Aged 15 Years Single Pot Still (92 proof, \$80) An example of the style of mixing malted and unmalted barley in one whiskey. Not chill-filtered, it delivers a range of notes, including berries, peaches, honey, caramel and licorice.

Sexton Single Malt (80 proof, \$30) A new Northern Ireland whiskey, aged on the grounds of Old Bushmills distillery, Sexton has the heady bread-dough aroma of its pot-still origin and the fruity flavors of its Sherry cask aging. A cheese note touches on the upper palate.

Slane (80 proof, \$30) Triple-casked, this new brand is aged in a combination of virgin, former Sherry casks and American whiskey barrels, supplied by Brown-Forman, a partner in the venture. All the touchstones of American whiskey—caramel, toffee and vanilla—are here, supplemented with soft spice and lively fruit.

Teeling Single Malt (92 proof, \$55) The maturation of this malt involves five cask types, including Sherry, Port and Madeira. The whiskey is not chill-filtered nor colored. It starts out perfumed and quickly moves into meaty fruit with raisins and vanilla and a leathery spice. (We sampled whiskey made at Cooley distillery before the new Dublin facility opened.)

Tullamore D.E.W. Cider Cask Finish (80 proof, \$40) Formerly only available in Ireland, the cider-cask-finish D.E.W. now comes to America, but only seasonally. A few months in an apple-cider cask produces the expected apple flavor in spades. But also there is caramel, toast, cinnamon and molasses.

The Tyrconnell Single Malt 15 Year Madeira Cask Finish (92 proof, \$100) Another Cooley Distillery product that revived an old brand, this recently released, limited-edition whiskey is distilled twice and finished in former Madeira wine casks after a 15-year maturation in Bourbon barrels. The first flush is buttery with the sweetness of honey, before giving way to notes of orange marmalade and tingling spices. A long finish. ♦





Monaco's Magic

Long the playground for the rich and famous, the Mediterranean's petite principality is the world's most luxurious country

BY LARRY OLMSTED

Monte Carlo's Casino Square contains the world-famous gambling house (center) as well as the luxurious Hôtel de Paris (right).

IT'S A PLACE where the locals' idea of Uber is a helicopter transfer from the airport, where you can't walk a block without seeing a McLaren or Lamborghini, where you can clothes shop in the company of royalty, dine next to billionaires and bet in the world's most glamorous casino. Champagne flows like water, and the water itself floats the swankiest private yachts. And it's all packed in a space smaller than New York's Central Park.

The Principality of Monaco is not the world's smallest country (that's Vatican City), but it is the richest. Its three-quarter-mile area boasts the highest per capita GDP (\$187,000) and the largest percentage of millionaires (29.2). A long list of royalty, movie stars, professional athletes and musicians swell the ranks of its 38,400 population, enjoying the tax-free haven with a gorgeous setting on the Mediterranean. While residents include Ringo Starr, tennis star Novak Djokovic

and numerous Formula One drivers, the country also draws its share of celebrity visitors, from Leonardo DiCaprio to Jay Z—especially those who attend the nearby Cannes Film Festival. The top two Michelin-star holders, Alain Ducasse and Joël Robuchon, both operate multiple world-class restaurants here.

That the tiny nation enjoys a larger-than-life reputation is no accident. Monaco leverages a calendar flush with ultrahigh-profile sporting and cultural events and basks in a fantasy image created by the real-life fairy-tale wedding of American movie star Grace Kelly to Prince Rainier and its deep association with fictional spy James Bond. The inspiration for Ian Fleming's debut 007 novel, *Casino Royale*, Monaco's Casino de Monte-Carlo would become a set in multiple Bond films. Roger Moore, who played 007 more than anyone else, called Monaco home, as does singer Shirley Bassey, the only one to record two different Bond theme songs, *Goldfinger* and *Diamonds Are Forever*.

But Monaco's glamor is relatively recent. For much of its early history, it was one of Europe's poorest countries. Previously a colony of Genoa and later Aragon, it was purchased by the Grimaldi family in 1419. Between 1848 and 1861 Monaco lost 96 percent of its territory—the most fertile parts—to France, much of it ceded by its own citizens. It's a decision their descendants have likely regretted, given that today the Monegasque pay no taxes and enjoy high-quality free education and health care. But at the time, Monaco was desperate for economic reinvention, and in 1855, it legalized gambling. Nevertheless, the first few casino attempts failed because of inaccessibility.

In 1863 the royal family created a holding company, Société des Bains de Mer (SBM), to run things. The Société built the belle époque Monte Carlo structure and handed operations over to François Blanc, manager of a successful German casino. To deliver gamblers, Blanc quickly expanded steamship routes from Nice and then built a railroad and funicular connecting the casino with the train platform. Most famously, he eliminated the double-zero from the roulette wheel, lowering the house edge. So successful was Blanc that he became known as “the Magician of Monaco.” By 1869 the casino was doing so well that the principality no longer needed to tax its citizens. SBM now operates multiple casinos, hotels, restaurants and nightclubs here.

This pattern of self-reliance helped the country overcome its fundamental geographic problem—with no place to expand east, west or north, it instead turned to the sea, and through dredging and reclamation, expanded its footprint by 25 percent. Other venues are linked to Monaco in name only. The mountaintop Monte-Carlo Golf Club and the tennis stadium at the Monte-Carlo Country Club are actually in France. Yet Monaco proper still boasts one of the highest percentages of greenspace of any European city. The environmentally obsessed reigning monarch, H.S.H. Prince Albert II, requires all new buildings to preserve a minimum of 30 percent of their square footage as open space. It is but one kilometer from the inland French border to the Mediterranean, with no bad neighborhoods, no crime to speak of. “We can talk about Monaco as a country, as a city or as a village,” says Claudia Bathhyany, an executive at the Fairmont Hotel.

“People get confused between Monte Carlo and Monaco,” explains Fatoumata Froissart Diallo, who runs Fair & Fairy, a



Gambling and dining contribute to Monaco's charm. Above: the cigar-friendly outdoor gaming area at Casino de Monte-Carlo. Top: Alain Ducasse's Le Louis XV restaurant (left) and the casino interior (right).



Guests of Le Vistamar restaurant at the Hotel Hermitage enjoy local Mediterranean seafood and views of a harbor with some of the world's swankiest yachts.

high-end private guide and travel service. "There are six districts within the principality, and Monte Carlo is just one, but it's the most famous, so everyone just calls the whole place that." The gentle slope that is Monte Carlo contains the Casino de Monte-Carlo as well as the city's top four luxury hotels. The famous casino, the Hôtel de Paris, the Opera House, and the Café de Paris, with its own attached smaller casino, form the main square, while other fine hotels, the Metropole, Fairmont and Hermitage, fan out around it. Looking down towards the marina and Mediterranean is the Old Town, home to the palace, as well as the nation's

"There are six districts, and because Monte Carlo is the most famous, everyone calls the whole place that."

acclaimed oceanography museum/institute. The U-shaped port is its own neighborhood. Stretching along the waterfront are resort-style hotels and the city's main beach. A small residential area sits above Monte Carlo.

But tiny Monaco packs a big punch. The most powerful tourism draw is the region's slate of high-profile annual events. Its superior lodging and dining options serve many celebrities at the nearby Cannes Film Festival. Monaco's marina hosts Europe's largest in-water boat show (50,000 visitors, 600 boats), the Cannes Yachting Festival. Held on clay, the Monte-Carlo Rolex Masters is one of the nine Super Tournaments of tennis.

The Monaco Formula One Grand Prix is arguably the world's No. 1 race and certainly the most important event in its class. With the Indianapolis 500 and the 24 Hours of Le Mans, it comprises the Triple Crown of Motorsports. Held since 1929, it is the only F1 raced entirely on public streets. Except for a single small patch of grass, every vantage point requires a ticket or real estate with a view. Yachts on the waterside of the racetrack, Hôtel de Paris rooms overlooking the casino square and Fairmont Hotel rooms with balconies above the iconic hairpin are coveted spots.

The Grand Prix, which takes place in May, is wrapped in a bow for those who can afford to attend. Every hotel in town sells it as a four-night package. The hospitality industry makes about 15 percent of its annual revenue in these 96 hours, with food and drink at substantial premiums and the better hotels commanding \$2,500 nightly. Racing fan George Lucas lays out \$86,000 each year for one of four corner suites at the Fairmont, with views of both the hairpin turn and the equally famous tunnel. "The noise of the cars becomes like music," says Batthyany. The race is preceded a week earlier by either the Historical F1 race, with vintage cars, or the E-Prix, with open-cockpit electric cars.

"If you ever get the chance, go during Princess Stephanie's circus event in January," advises broadcaster and journalist Michael Patrick Shiels, who hosts a syndicated drive-time morning radio show that occasionally visits Monaco. "Concession stands sell crepes and Champagne instead of peanuts and beer, and it's the fanciest circus you'll ever see." The Monte-Carlo International Circus Festival is the Cannes Film Festival of the circus world. Hundreds of acts apply and the two best performances are

awarded the Gold and Silver Clown. It features animal acts, comedic performances and choreographed acrobatic feats. Prince Albert heads the judging panel while his sister, Princess Stephanie, opens the festivities.

Other one-of-a-kind Monaco annual events include an opera fest, off-road rally race, arts festival, philharmonic, international music festival, dance forum and one of the world's most prestigious fireworks competitions. The gala Rose Ball, held every March, is the Principality's major charity event, benefitting the Princess Grace Foundation. The Ball requires fancy dress, but that is hardly unusual in fashion-centric Monaco.

"What I love about Monaco is that you can be anyone you want there," says Shiels, who has done his broadcasts in white dinner jacket and bow tie. "It's one of the only places you can just wear a tux to dinner without a reason and feel normal, but you don't have to....There are always celebrities in town, and where

chandeliers, each containing over 300 pounds of Bohemian crystal and covered in gold leaf. Two features you are unlikely to ever see in another casino are a large grand clock and natural lighting, with windows and skylights. Tiny by Vegas standards, it has a handful of gaming tables, a few slot machines, and a large bar, where during the day tourists live out their James Bond fantasy moments by ordering pricey Martinis (shaken not stirred). The bar is popular even before gambling starts, as the doors open at 9:30 A.M. for sightseeing. Wagering—along with a dress code banning jeans, sneakers and requiring jackets for men—commences at 2 P.M.

The real scene is in the smaller "private" back rooms, which require another 10 euro cover, and are more lavish and atmospheric. (Admittance to both areas is waived for guests of SBM lodgings: Hôtel de Paris, Hermitage, Monte-Carlo Beach, Monte-Carlo Bay and assorted rental villas.) The semiprivate rooms spill

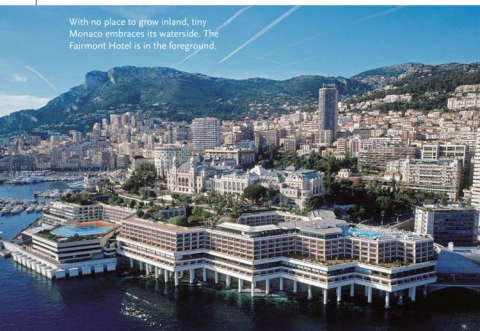
into one another, and while not large, the entire complex is bigger than it looks, with a couple of restaurants and bars, multiple gaming areas, and one of the most prestigious opera houses in Europe at one end. Whereas the big action is in the semiprivate back area, with chips (actually rectangular plaques) running up to one million euros, table minimums are surprisingly low. They start at just five, 10 or 25 euros depending on the game, with the most popular being roulette, baccarat and blackjack (there are no craps). All the gaming tables are by law made here in Monaco, and beautifully appointed, the wood all polished and the felt immaculate. Armrests are leather and cupholders brass. Nothing is remotely worn or tired. When smoking was banned indoors, the casino added a back-patio gaming area that is pleasantly al fresco, on a large marble terrace overlooking the Mediterranean. It has about a dozen tables and cigars for sale.

The three other casinos in the country are more for convenience than grandeur.

A small one featuring mainly slots is in the back of the Café de Paris. The Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel and Fairmont each contain their own, the latter being "American style" with games like craps and three-card poker.

"To me Monte Carlo is a tiny jewel box," says Anne Scully, president of McCabe World Travel in Virginia. Having explored every inch over the years, she suggested some of her top sites: "My favorite area is Princess Grace's Rose Garden, and another favorite is the Japanese Garden. The Royal Castle has tours of the Prince's State Apartments and don't miss the changing of the guards, always at 11:55 A.M. sharp. Afterwards, there are some wonderful restaurants hidden in the alleys close to the castle. Le Montgolfière Henri-Geraci is a great choice. Very close to Monte-Carlo in Saint Jean Cap-Ferrat is Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, a walk back in time to how the great wealth of the world lived. The

With no place to grow inland, tiny Monaco embraces its waterside. The Fairmont Hotel is in the foreground.



else might I stand shoulder to shoulder with a billionaire or movie star? Not in Vegas that's for sure. But despite the glamour, it's very open and accessible, because it's so small and secure. You might well see Shirley Bassey or Princess Caroline. Prince Albert has been known to get bored with the food at his palace and walk across the street and sit at the bar at this little family-owned Italian restaurant in the Old Town—his neighborhood joint I guess." Diallo adds that she has seen Princess Caroline and her daughter shopping in Zara of all places. And during a recent visit to the city Prince Albert drove past—in one of Monaco's humbler sedans.

The casino is equally popular with gamblers and gawkers, though the latter don't get beyond the first room. There's a 10 euro entry fee to get inside the main casino (unless you have dining reservations). Heavily gilded—more palace than casino—it sports a domed rotunda, masters' paintings and huge, ornate

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CANADA





JOËL ROBUCHON AT THE METROPOLE



LOUIS XV AT HÔTEL DE PARIS



CIGARS AT HÔTEL HERMITAGE

Living Like a Prince

CIGAR FRIENDLY

Cigars are widely popular in Monaco, and all the major hotels, including Saphir at the Fairmont, Crystal Bar in the Hermitage and the Metropole Bar have either rooftop or outdoor bars and patios. The lobby bar at Le Meridien overlooks the Mediterranean and offers cigars paired with smoked cocktails. The Casino de Monte-Carlo has a cigar-friendly gaming patio.

DINING BY CHEF

Alain Ducasse Second in Michelin stars amassed, Ducasse runs three restaurants here. His three-star outpost, Le Louis XV, is where James Bond would eat. It has daily tasting menu, à la carte items and a dress code. Ducasse also operates the hotel's only slightly more casual Le Grill restaurant, and the Trattoria at the Monaco Sporting Club.

Joël Robuchon The world leader in Michelin stars awarded operates all the dining venues in the Metropole Hotel. Joël Robuchon Monte-Carlo is very relaxed for a two-star, with an open kitchen. Many dishes are accompanied by the chef's signature decadent mashed potatoes. His first Japanese

effort, Yoshi, is one of the best in Europe. Odyssey, located at the pool complex, is his seafood-driven concept. Done in partnership with fashion icon Karl Lagerfeld, it is exclusive to Metropole guests.

Chef Benoit Witz Witz is famed for his handling of the region's seafood. His Vistamar venue at the Hermitage hotel delivers ocean views along with Michelin-starred cuisine.

Marcel Ravin Blue Bay at the Monte Carlo Bay Hotel restaurant earns a star for its Mediterranean-Caribbean fusion cuisine by Ravin, who hails from Martinique.

Nobu Matsuhisa The city's most recent high-profile addition is an outpost of Nobu, serving the groundbreaking Peruvian-Japanese fusion cuisine from the global legend Nobu Matsuhisa. Located at the Fairmont Hotel, it's now one of the most popular spots in town.

LODGING

Hôtel de Paris Located on the casino square, Hôtel de Paris was just extensively renovated with fewer, but larger, rooms, brand new suites and a pool and spa to complement its beach. Restaurants include Alain Ducasse's

three-star Le Louis XV.
hoteldeparismontecarlo.com

Metropole One of the few hotels that the government doesn't own a stake in, Metropole contains the city's finest spa, a Karl Lagerfeld-designed pool, first-class rooms and four restaurants by legendary chef Joël Robuchon. It is attached to a luxury retail shopping mall, in the heart of Monte-Carlo.

metropole.com/en

Hôtel Hermitage Located near the Metropole, the city's third most luxurious hotel, Hôtel Hermitage, is a sister property to the Hôtel de Paris and home to the Michelin-starred Vistamar restaurant, as well as a notable cigar and spirits lounge.

hotelhermitagemontecarlo.com

Fairmont Monte Carlo The large Fairmont has its own casino as well as Mediterranean views and some of the most coveted vantage points for watching the Grand Prix.

fairmont.com/monte-carlo/

Le Meridien The most resort-like of the Monte Carlo hotels, Le Meridien has both a beach and a pool complex. Its cigar-friendly lobby overlooks the Mediterranean.

lemeridienmontecarlo.com

medieval walled Èze village, just over the border in France, is a treat. The views are breathtaking and it's home to the wonderful Michelin two-star Chevre d'Or. I was fortunate to see Elizabeth Taylor and George Hamilton in the dining room there once."

Other top attractions include the renowned Oceanographic Institute and its museum. Founded in 1910, it was one of the principality's first forays into environmental awareness and protection. Built into the cliffside, it contains three floors of public aquariums and museums. It also has an open-air rooftop bar and café with one of the best views in Monaco. The Prince's Palace, originally built as a fort atop the Old City in the 13th century, has vast sections open to the public. Daily tours include the room where Prince Rainier and Grace Kelly were married. Its daily changing of the guard is almost whimsical. The Exotic Gardens feature more than 7,000 flora from around the world, in addition to a cave filled with stalactites and stalagmites. The 1878 Opera House, part of the casino, is renowned for attracting world-class opera singers and ballets. Few visitors miss the Princess Grace Rose Garden, which boasts 8,000 rose bushes, a small lake and an olive grove spread across nearly 10 acres. The separate and equally well-done Japanese Zen garden sits at the city's eastern edge.

Prince Rainier was an avid collector, and today his 100-plus vintage cars are on public display, including the rare 1903 De Dion Bouton and dozens of models from the likes of Rolls Royce, Facel Vega, Lamborghini, Delahaye, Packard, Ferrari, Maserati and Delage.

For many visitors, food and lodging are highlights, with the two most successful living chefs in good company with other culinary stars. "It is home to some of the finest hotels and restaurants in all of Europe, from Alain Ducasse's Le Louis XV at Hôtel de Paris to Joël Robuchon at the Metropole," notes Scully. Born in France, Ducasse fell under Monaco's spell and is now a citizen. His three-star restaurant is the must-have reservation, with an elaborate chef's tasting menu that varies daily and a dress code. Not to be outdone, his rival Joël Robuchon, nicknamed "Chef of the Century," operates all four dining venues in the Metropole Hotel. His namesake Joël Robuchon Monte-Carlo is very relaxed for a two-star. Robuchon also does the bar menu, available on the hotel's cigar-friendly patio, a coveted spot for the F1 race.

Monaco is clearly a place for living the good life. "They love their Champagne in Monaco, and every lunch or dinner begins with at least a glass," adds Shiels. "If a restaurant does not wheel a Champagne cart tableside when you are seated, that's a red flag." Even the Fairmont's 24-hour lobby restaurant (with outdoor seating for smoking) has an ice and bubbly laden cart. Rooftop bars can be found atop the Oceanographic Institute and most hotels. All are cigar friendly.



The prestigious Monaco Grand Prix is held entirely on the streets of the principality (above). Sebastian Vettel celebrates his victory in the 2017 race.



Joël Robuchon macaroons. "People who come every few years feel like it's a different place because we're always transforming," says Batthyany.

Descriptions that would pigeonhole Monaco as "the classy Vegas," or "Dubai with soul," fall well short of the reality. The place is more like the best of Paris, with the cultural, culinary and historical highlights distilled to their finest and set next to a beach—with a surprising authenticity. It's as if the country has not forgotten its roots. Strict rules require that all new builds contain affordable subsidized housing for working-class residents. It's inspiring the way royalty moves among the common folk with minimal fuss, and day-trippers off cruise ships are welcomed as warmly as Hollywood stars. It's a perfect long weekend on its own, an anchor for a visit to Provence, the South of France or Italy, and a popular cruise destination. And for any of these, it's a magical spot. ♦

Larry Olmsted writes often on travel for CIGAR AFICIONADO.

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1993

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cigars

100 CIGAR REVIEW

Our panel of cigar-smoking editors tackles 80 cigars to assess their quality, and finds a host of superb smokes. Several of them are stunning bargains.

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125 CUBA'S SPECIAL CIGAR PANEL

CIGAR AFICIONADO'S Gordon Mott gets an inside look at how Cuban cigars are analyzed and evaluated, and gets to smoke a new cigar that may come to market soon.

JEFF HARRIS

churchills

Big, elegant and stately, the Churchill cigar size commands your attention for well more than an hour. In this time-tested age in which we live, they aren't as popular as they used to be, but we have found no shortage of fine examples worthy of you setting aside the demands of the day. Seven of the cigars in this category scored 90 points or higher, led by the superb 93-point showing for the Punch After Dinner from Honduras. This fine cigar, made with an intriguing combination of tobaccos from Central and South America, the Dominican Republic and Connecticut, is not only a top-scorer, but an exceptional value. A seven-inch-long cigar for less than \$6? That makes us smile. A trio of Nicaraguan cigars scored 92 points. The Oliva Serie V Melanio Churchill comes from Oliva Cigars, the San Cristobal is from the Garcia family and Ashton Distributors. And the Pappy Van Winkle smoke is named for one of the rarest of Bourbon whiskeys, and made by the talented cigarmakers at Drew Estate. You'll note the absence of Cuban Churchills. The Cuban cigar industry has cut back on its Churchills, making Havana Churchills quite rare.



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA,
DOM. REP.
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PUNCH AFTER DINNER

The smoke of this dark Churchill is dense and chewy in texture. Its leather and earth notes are balanced by a molasses and brown sugar sweetness.

U.S.: \$5.89 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

93



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

OLIVA SERIE V MELANIO CHURCHILL

A large, box-pressed cigar with rounded shoulders. Initial puffs are rich with a chocolate malted sweetness underscored with fresh sour apple and a mesquite finish.

U.S.: \$14.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PAPPY VAN WINKLE TRADITION CHURCHILL

Rich and spicy from the start, this cigar's opulent draw shows big notes of almonds, caramel and wood. The coffee-bean finish is long and rich.

U.S.: \$23.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SAN CRISTOBAL REVELATION TRIUMPH

The box-pressed form gives this Churchill a rectangular appearance. It's a hearty cigar that has the smokiness of a Sumatra-bean coffee, oaky red wine notes and a bit of caramel.

U.S.: \$8.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

BRICK HOUSE CHURCHILL

Earthy and cedary with clear, zesty notes of orange peel and citrus that lead to a graham cracker finish.

U.S.: \$7.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

91

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

SURROGATES SATIN GLOVE

A box-pressed Churchill with an even burn and open draw. Its cedary aspects are complemented by notes of coffee, chocolate and caramel.

U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.,
PANAMA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: MEXICO

MICALLEF EXPERIENCIA LA CREMA

A Churchill with an excellent draw and burn. Each puff shows an earthy, leathery quality along with touches of nuts and chocolate. The finish hints of cinnamon.

U.S.: \$13.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

AGING ROOM QUATTRO F59 CONCERTO

A box-pressed Churchill with a clean, even burn. Notes of wood and leather are accentuated by spice and citrus, though the finish is a bit short.

U.S.: \$10.74 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE AÑEJO RESERVA NO. 48

A dark maduro covered in glue spots near the head. It's a woody, earthy smoke with some toastiness and a menthol finish.

U.S.: \$11.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

DANIEL MARSHALL BLACK LABEL CHURCHILL

The lightly hued, blond wrapper of this cigar foreshadows the mild, straw-and-hay qualities of the smoke, which also leaves faint impressions of cloves and wood.

U.S.: \$8.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA GLORIA CUBANA CHURCHILL

Roughly constructed with a sloppy cap, this is a predominantly leathery, earthy smoke with some heavy mineral notes and a sharp, charred wood finish.

U.S.: \$6.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88**U.S.A.**

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

TATUAJE RESERVA SW

There's a floral note underscoring this Churchill's peppery and spicy cardamom qualities, which lead to a woody finish. The draw is a bit firm but delivers substantial smoke.

U.S.: \$13.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

VILLIGER CUELLAR CONNECTICUT KREME CHURCHILL

The easy draw of this Churchill produces lots of creamy smoke with hints of wood, earth and sweet nougat, though the finish is charry.

U.S.: \$6.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

88

Few would choose a corona as their go-to cigar size, but the tidy shape makes for a perfect shorter smoke. The Cuban standard for the corona vitola is a very strict 5 1/4 inches long by 42 ring; for CIGAR AFICIONADO tasting standards, our corona category covers cigars between 5 1/4 to 6 inches long, 38 ring gauge to 45. Only four scored 90 points or higher. The Dominican Romeo y Julieta Cedro de Luxe No. 2, made with a heavy component of Dominican tobaccos and wrapped in Indonesian cover leaf, led the category with a score of 92 points. With a suggested retail price of \$6.72, it's also a bargain. Cuba's Cohiba Siglo II scored 91, and a pair of well-known Dominican smokes, the Arturo Fuente Don Carlos No. 3 and the Montecristo White Montecristo Court scored 90 points.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: INDONESIA

ROMEO Y JULIETA 1875 CEDRO DELUXE NO. 2

This small corona delivers big, chewy notes of nougat, pistachio and almonds fortified with leathery intonations. Rich and elegant.

U.S.: \$6.72 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2015

COHIBA SIGLO II (TUBO)

Distinct notes of leather become evident on the first puff, followed by an earthy tanginess, a hint of orange marmalade and a chocolate finish. Rich and delicious.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £24.50 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

ARTURO FUENTE DON CARLOS NO. 3

Though covered in a dull, off-colored wrapper, this cigar draws and burns beautifully, offering a nutty, fruity smoke with a touch of sour cherry and honey-like finish.

U.S.: \$9.85 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MONTECRISTO WHITE MONTECRISTO COURT

Covered in a textbook, golden-brown shade of medio claro wrapper. The draw is firm, but still imparts a creamy, floral smoke that picks up a graham cracker note and mild earthiness.

U.S.: \$10.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

DEBONAIRE MADURO SAGITA PETITE LANCERO

A near-black corona with a pigtail cap. It has a brownie-like, cocoa quality buttressed by ground coffee notes and a tangy, cherry finish.

U.S.: \$8.74 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
 FILLER: CUBA
 BINDER: CUBA
 WRAPPER: CUBA
 BOX DATE: JULY 2016

H. UPMANN CORONA MAJOR

A gritty-looking corona with a notably uneven burn. Notes of wood and vanilla carry traces of earth and nuttiness, but the burn affected the score.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £16.60 STRENGTH: Medium

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 9/16"
 FILLER: DOM. REP.
 BINDER: DOM. REP.
 WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

LEÓN JIMENES NO. 4

Pale and lumpy, this corona is far better than it looks, delivering a thick, creamy smoke hinting of nutmeg, raisin and spicy gingersnap.

U.S.: \$6.14 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
 FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,
 U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF
 BINDER: ECUADOR
 WRAPPER: MEXICO

MATILDE OSCURA CORONA

Earthy from start to finish, this dark, maduro-wrapped corona shows intermittent notes of sassafras, minerals and black cherry as well.

U.S.: \$7.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA
 BINDER: HONDURAS
 WRAPPER: ECUADOR

HERRERA ESTELI LONSDALE DELUXE

Floral and nutty, this picture-perfect corona develops heavy notes of cedar before a slightly vegetal finish.

U.S.: \$9.28 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

87

**U.S.A.**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
 FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
 BINDER: ECUADOR
 WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA PALINA ILLUMINATION COLONIAL

A predominantly woody corona that draws and burns evenly. It becomes tangy and zesty, but leaves that palate a bit dry.

U.S.: \$10.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

87

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
 FILLER: DOM. REP.
 BINDER: DOM. REP.
 WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ASHTON AGED MADURO NO. 20

A rough-looking cigar with a gnarly wrapper and glue spots. Its light vanilla notes become bread and herbal before turning earthy, though the finish is a bit saccharine.

U.S.: \$9.15 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

86

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA
 BINDER: BRAZIL, MEXICO
 WRAPPER: MEXICO

TABAQUERO HAMLET PAREDES CORONA

Nearly black in appearance, this corona is a sweet, earthy smoke carrying hints of cedar, toast and a cola-like finish.

U.S.: \$8.55 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

corona gordas

There's a reason why corona gordas (also known as toros) have become one of the cigar world's most popular sizes. They are fairly fat, but not overwhelmingly so, and they have considerable but not unmanageable length. On top of that, the quality level is superb. Twelve of the cigars in this category scored 90 points or higher, and with the lowest score at 88 points, there isn't a bad cigar in the entire bunch. Three topped the charts at 92 points, and each of them are well-known to the cigar-smoking public: Joya de Nicaragua, H. Upmann from Cuba and Ashton VSG from the Dominican Republic. If this review is any barometer, it's hard to go wrong with a corona gorda.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ASHTON VIRGIN SUN GROWN ROBUSTO
Enrobed in a chocolate-brown wrapper, this cigar offers refined notes of oak, cocoa and nuts along with hints of red wine and molasses. Balanced and elegant.
U.S.: \$11.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

92



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MAY 2014

H. UPMANN MAGNUM 46 (TUBO)
There's a toasty, nutty quality to this smoke that also smacks of sweet orange marmalade and leather, leaving a slightly floral aftertaste. Rich and opulent.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £23.60 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

JOYA DE NICARAGUA ANTAÑO 1970 GRAN RESERVA ROBUSTO GRANDE
Dark and box-pressed, this attractive cigar has a pleasantly toasty core that's elevated by hints of saffron, hickory wood and chocolate. The finish is sweet and woody.
U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2017

COHIBA TALISMÁN EDICIÓN LIMITADA 2017
Each puff of this dark, pigtailed cigar unfolds layers of honey, minerals and almond notes before bolder impressions of cocoa powder and oak emerge.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £69.00 STRENGTH: Medium

91



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

PADILLA 1932 TORO
Crafted with an excellent head and cap, this dark, oily cigar has a rich leather and sweet cocoa quality that melds pleasantly with touches of juniper and anise.
U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL PLATINUM LIMITED EDITION HABANO ROBUSTO
Rich and earthy from the first puff, this dark, pressed cigar shows a dark chocolate and espresso bean character with hints of toast and an oak, red wine finish.
U.S.: \$11.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
 BINDER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
 WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY PRENSADO LOST ART GRAN TORO

A boxed-pressed cigar with a rich, earthy quality and caramel sweetness along with hints of chestnuts and herbs. The finish is long.

U.S.: \$10.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
 FILLER: CUBA
 BINDER: CUBA
 WRAPPER: CUBA
 BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2016

PARTAGÁS SERIE E NO. 2 (TUBO)

Floral first puffs become toasty and oaky, carrying hints of cocoa bean before suddenly turning piquant with a jabañero pepper spice.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £34.20 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 6"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PLASENCIA ALMA DEL CAMPO SENDERO

The superb draw of this well-made cigar offers lots of white pepper, oak and cocoa notes, interspersed with touches of salt and a floral finish.

U.S.: \$17.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
 FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA,
 DOM. REP., PERU, U.S.A./PENN.
 BROADLEAF
 BINDER: MEXICO
 WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

PSYKO SEVEN TORO

Initial notes of dampness quickly dissipate, developing an earthy, oaky smoke with hints of fruit, espresso and cocoa.

U.S.: \$8.26 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

TIERRA VOLCAN CLASICO

Rolled with a rounded head and uncut foot. Initial puffs are strong and leathery with floral undertones before mellowing out to show cedar and a hint of chocolate.

U.S.: \$9.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
 FILLER: CUBA
 BINDER: CUBA
 WRAPPER: CUBA
 BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2017

TRINIDAD LA TROVA

Crafted with a pigtail cap, this large cigar delivers notes of fresh tobacco, wheat and nuts that are balanced by sweeter touches of caramel and gingersnap.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £33.30 STRENGTH: Medium

90

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

EL CENTURION ROBUSTO

This robusto has a clear malty, nutty character with salty hints of leather. Though covered in a rough wrapper, it's much tastier than it looks.

U.S.: \$7.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ESPINOSA HABANO TORO BOX-PRESSED

An alluringly box-pressed cigar with a three-seam cap. The creamy, nutty smoke carries a touch of cinnamon and a yeasty, bread-dough finish.

U.S.: \$8.40 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

figurados

Figurados, or shaped cigars, tend to be better than average, so we were surprised to rate only four cigars 90 points or higher in this particular taste test. The top-scoring cigar of the group was the Alec Bradley Black Market Esteli. This is a new version of the company's Black Market brand, made in Nicaragua rather than Honduras. It's a stronger smoke, medium to full in body, and it provides a nice bang for the buck, with a suggested retail price of just under \$9. The Arturo Fuente Hemingway Classic has been consistently superb since the 1980s, and it's a standout smoke made with Cameroon wrapper. A La Flor Dominicana and a Montecristo rounded out our gos.



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ALEC BRADLEY BLACK MARKET ESTELI TORPEDO

A rich combination of savory and sweet, this oily torpedo is loaded with earthy, leathery notes balanced by undercurrents of raisin and cocoa. Delicious and satisfying.

U.S.: \$8.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

93



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

ARTURO FUENTE HEMINGWAY CLASSIC
A long, double-tapered perfecto with a superb draw. Its toasty, woody qualities meld harmoniously with notes of tea, cashew and caramel. An elegant cigar.

U.S.: \$9.55 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

92



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA FLOR DOMINICANA DOUBLE LIGERO CHISEL

Fashioned with a wedge-shaped head, this well-made figurado is spicy and bold with lots of leather notes and some woodiness. The finish is rich and hearty.

U.S.: \$9.70 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,
PERU
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

MONTECRISTO GRUPO DE MAESTROS PRIVATE BATCH III BELICOSO

This oily figurado layers the palate with fairly clear notes of leather, wood and nuanced herbs. There is a slight peppermint zing on the finish.

U.S.: \$16.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

DON PEPIN GARCIA CUBAN CLASSIC 1970

A light and toasty torpedo with plenty of almond notes, a touch of vanilla bean and a woody finish. Tasty and consistent.

U.S.: \$8.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

EL TROVADOR PETIT BELICOSO

The earthy smoke of this short, box-pressed figurado also conveys touches of coconut and wood before a subtle hint of marzipan on the finish.

U.S.: \$7.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: APRIL 2016

MONTECRISTO PETIT NO. 2 (TUBO)
This short figurado smokes a bit hot and fast, showing a hickory and mesquite character along with earthiness, sweet cinnamon and a grassy finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £24.20 STRENGTH: Medium

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 6000
This box-pressed pyramid has a tangy start that leads to a mostly nutty smoke with hints of licorice, dark toast and a wine-like finish.
U.S.: \$8.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF MILLENNIUM BLEND SERIES PIRAMIDES
The elongated taper and tip gives this torpedo a dramatic appearance. It draws and burns evenly, showing a spicy palate of white pepper, saffron and cardamom with earthiness and a flinty finish.
U.S.: \$25.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC RING GAUGE:
52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

E.P. CARRILLO ELENOS ACTO MAYOR
A very dark torpedo with a toothy wrapper. Notes of coffee bean and earth become sweeter, but the finish is a bit dry.
U.S.: \$9.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

MACANUDO CAFÉ DUKE OF WINDSOR
Oils are seeping through the wrapper of this pointy cigar, which has a conical tip. It's a toasty smoke with gentle notes of cloves, lemon peel and a cedary finish.
U.S.: \$9.19 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

88



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF,
U.S.A./CONN. SHADE
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL ROYALE TORPEDO
The wrapper of this box-pressed belicoso is pristine and smooth. The smoke is dense and chewy with coffee, earth and a bit of dark chocolate, but the flavors become a bit muddled.
U.S.: \$11.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA MAGNA COLORADO GRAN UNICO
This oily figurado draws and burns easily and evenly. It starts salty and sharp before notes of nuts and citrus usher in a mineral-heavy finish.
U.S.: \$9.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87



BAHAMAS
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7 1/8"
FILLER: COSTA RICA, NICARAGUA,
HONDURAS
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: COSTA RICA

GRAYCLIFF CHATEAU GRAND CRU SALOMON
A large, long perfect with curves and tapers. The draw is tight, and first puffs are notably musty before hints of oak, almonds and a flinty finish.
U.S.: \$26.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

miscellaneous

The Miscellaneous category covers a wide range of smokes, so it's little surprise that the tasting has a wide range of scores, from 85 points to 93. At the top is the Last Call by A.J. Fernandez, yet another example of the superb cigars being made by this rising star from Nicaragua. Two of our favorite smaller smokes, the Padrón Serie 1926 No. 35 and the Montecristo Petit Edmundo, scored 92. Close behind were standout smokes by boutique brand Illusione and the much larger Montecristo. Note the 88-point performance by the Partagás Culebra. This Cuban curiosity, three smokes braided into one, is a fun distraction. Watch our video on culebras at video.cigaraficionado.com.



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LAST CALL BY A.J. FERNANDEZ CHIQUITAS

A short, stout cigar with an uncut foot. It's a toasty, nutty smoke fortified with chewy, earthy notes and a savory, leathery finish.

U.S.: \$4.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

93



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: APRIL 2014

MONTECRISTO PETIT EDMUNDO (TUBO)

Sweet and savory with a balanced, elegant interplay of leathery notes, café au lait and a dark chocolate finish. The draw is a bit firm.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £20.90 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN SERIE 1926 NO. 35

A small box-pressed mini robusto with a lush draw that imparts an earthy smoke with toasty, fruit qualities and a mineral finish.

U.S.: \$11.70 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2017

QUAI D'ORSAY NO. 54

Rich woods, leather and chocolate intonations layer the palate in beautiful balance. The draw is opulent, the burn dead even. A robust and flavorful cigar.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: 14.00 euro STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

ILLUSIONE 68 MADURO

Solid to the touch, this small corona has an open, substantial draw that layers the palate with a meaty, earthy smoke balanced by hints of ginger, licorice and a toffee sweetness.

U.S.: \$6.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

91



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 4 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MONTE BY MONTECRISTO A.J. FERNANDEZ ROBUSTO

A short, fat, beautifully crafted cigar that delivers heavy notes of coffee bean and chocolate. Hints of caramel and clove precede a mineral-like finish.

U.S.: \$11.23 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 4"
 FILLER: HONDURAS
 BINDER: HONDURAS
 WRAPPER: HONDURAS

EIROA 48x4

A softly pressed short robusto that burns cool, evenly and slow. There's a steady procession of fruit, earth and cedar, but the finish is a bit chalky.
 U.S.: \$10.42 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
 FILLER: CUBA
 BINDER: CUBA
 WRAPPER: CUBA
 BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2016

TRINIDAD VIGÍA (TUBO)

This squat plug of a cigar is crafted with a neat pigtail cap. Buttery notes of wood and crushed almond are balanced by hints of agave and anise, though the finish is a bit dry.
 U.S.: N/A U.K.: £26.20 STRENGTH: Medium

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA
 BINDER: CAMEROON
 WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CROMAGNON AQUITAINE KNUCKLE DRAGGER

Solidly packed with a strikingly gleaming wrapper, this short robusto is full of earthy, coffee notes and touches of sweetness, but the smoke becomes a bit bitter and oily tasting.
 U.S.: \$6.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

88



RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 3 3/4"
 FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
 BINDER: DOM. REP.
 WRAPPER: HONDURAS

NAT SHERMAN TIMELESS COLLECTION NO. 5

Draped in a dark, oily wrapper, this robusto has a bit of a firm draw, but still imparts a salty, leathery smoke with notes of dried fruit and a sharp, oaky finish.
 U.S.: \$6.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 39 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
 FILLER: CUBA
 BINDER: CUBA
 WRAPPER: CUBA
 BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2014

PARTAGAS CULEBRA

Twisted and crooked, this serpentine cigar draws well, starting floral and woody yet intensifying to show earth and black pepper spice.
 U.S.: N/A U.K.: £37.40 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
 FILLER: NICARAGUA
 BINDER: NICARAGUA
 WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SERINO WAYFARER CORONA

A beautiful, reddish-brown corona that delivers a dense, creamy smoke rich in pistachio, hickory and coffee bean, but intermittent harshness affected the score.
 U.S.: \$6.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 3 3/4"
 FILLER: CUBA
 BINDER: CUBA
 WRAPPER: CUBA
 BOX DATE: JULY 2017

ROMEO Y JULIETA PETIT ROYALES

Stubby with a flat head, this cigar burns a bit hot, but delivers notes of spicy leather, nuts and maple sugar, though undercurrents of charred wood are persistent.
 U.S.: N/A U.K.: £13.50 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87



RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4"
 FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,
 U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
 BINDER: DOM. REP.
 WRAPPER: ECUADOR

QUESADA SELECCIÓN ESPAÑA SHORT ROBUSTO

A short robusto whose wrapper is gleaming with oil. It's musty and earthy with prominent floral notes, some cedar and a dry finish.
 U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

85

robustos

Short but stout, robust as befits its name, the plump but diminutive robusto is one of the most popular cigar sizes in the world. These sawed-off power smokes deliver complexity and strength in a short package, ideal for most situations. A half dozen of them scored 90 points, tying for highest score in the category. Among them are the La Aurora ADN Dominicana Robusto, an intriguing Dominican smoke powered by the addition of andullo tobacco. This leaf is twisted into a hard log, and is typically smoked in a pipe, but La Aurora uses a bit of it in this blend, adding a unique taste from the Dominican Republic to this cigar. The other gos come from a mix of established, larger cigarmakers and smaller boutique brands. La Alianza is a newer smoke from longtime cigar industry veteran Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, Cain comes from the Oliva Cigar Co. of Nicaragua, Guardian of the Farm is a small brand made by young cigarmakers (and finished with an uncut foot), San Lotano is from A.J. Fernandez and Viaje, a tiny brand, once was named No. 2 Cigar of the Year by this magazine.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CAIN DAYTONA 550

Draped in a clean wrapper, this cigar draws and burns perfectly. Woody undertones of earth and oak are enlivened by notes of apple cider, cinnamon and dried fruit.
U.S.: \$6.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

GUARDIAN OF THE FARM RAMBO

Rolled with an uncut foot, this short robusto exhibits a nutty, woody character with undercurrents of star anise, coffee and hazelnut.
U.S.: \$7.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA ALIANZA NATURAL ROBUSTO SELECTO

The woody core of this oily robusto is framed by notes of candy-coated almonds and earthy barnyard, though the finish is a bit charry.
U.S.: \$6.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., U.S.A./PENN.
BROADLEAF, NICARAGUA
BINDER: CAMEROON
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

LA AURORA ADN DOMINICANO ROBUSTO

A toothy robusto that leaves warm, toasty impressions on the palate before intensifying to show bolder notes of crushed black pepper and a coffee bean finish.
U.S.: \$7.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

SAN LOTANO REQUIEM MADURO ROBUSTO

Strikingly dark and box-pressed, this robusto shows an earthy palate of cocoa, coffee bean, raisins and a fudgy finish. The draw is a bit firm.
U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

VIAJE EXCLUSIVO NICARAGUA ROBUSTO
Nearly veinless, this pristine wrapper is the color of dark chocolate. Sweet notes of maple, brown sugar and toffee play off of the cigar's inherent earthiness and spice. The finish is a bit muted.
U.S.: \$8.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90



MEXICO
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: MEXICO

CASA TURRENT SERIE 1973 ROBUSTO
The draw of this box-pressed cigar is a bit airy, but offers prominent notes of dark chocolate and candied orange peel with touches of earth and a woody finish.
U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF WINSTON CHURCHILL THE LATE HOUR ROBUSTO
The textbook construction of this dark, oily cigar is evident in its perfect draw and burn. Initial mustiness eventually passes to show a trio of earth, wood and toast.
U.S.: \$17.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

VEGAS CUBANAS INVICTOS
Bumps and ridges protrude under the wrapper of this dark robusto, which is floral and nutty with hints of fruit and a chalky finish.
U.S.: \$7.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA GLORIA CUBANA COLECCIÓN RESERVA ROBUSTO
A bit lumpy to the touch, this cigar is woody and herbal in character. Spicy and chalky elements also come through before a predominantly woody finish.
U.S.: \$7.59 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: MEXICO

LA FLOR DOMINICANA 1994 CONGA
The nutty, herbal notes of this dark robusto are muted and a bit flat. Some black tea notes also come through, but the cigar seems closed.
U.S.: \$8.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

REGIUS SUN GROWN ROBUSTO
This dark robusto forms a flaky ash as it burns. It offers a combination of sweet cedar and spice, though there's some harshness on the finish.
U.S.: \$8.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA BARBA SIEMPRE 5 X 50
A yellowish robusto that forms a flaky ash. The smoke is creamy and light with a straw-and-hay character and dry woody finish.
U.S.: \$5.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

86

buying guide

TOP SCORES, VALUES AND STRENGTH | BLIND TASTE TEST NO. 143

TOP SCORES

-  **93** Alec Bradley Black Market Esteli Torpedo
Nicaragua • \$8.75 • Figurado • Medium-Full
-  **93** Last Call by A.J. Fernandez Chiquitas
Nicaragua • \$4.50 • Miscellaneous • Medium-Full
-  **93** Punch After Dinner
Honduras • \$5.89 • Churchill • Medium-Full
-  **92** Arturo Fuente Hemingway Classic
Dominican Republic • \$9.55 • Figurado • Medium
-  **92** Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Robusto
Dominican Republic • \$11.25 • Corona Gorda • Full
-  **92** H. Upmann Magnum 46 (Tubo)
Cuba • £23.60 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full
-  **92** Joya de Nicaragua Antaño Gran Res. Robusto Grande
Nicaragua • \$9.50 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full
-  **92** Montecristo Petit Edmundo (Tubo)
Cuba • £20.90 • Miscellaneous • Medium-Full
-  **92** Oliva Serie V Melanio Churchill
Nicaragua • \$14.00 • Churchill • Medium
-  **92** Padrón Serie 1926 No. 35
Nicaragua • \$11.70 • Miscellaneous • Medium-Full
-  **92** Pappy Van Winkle Tradition Churchill
Nicaragua • \$23.60 • Churchill • Medium-Full
-  **92** Romeo y Julieta 1875 Cedro Deluxe No. 2
Dominican Republic • \$6.72 • Corona • Medium

TOP VALUES

-  **93** Last Call by A.J. Fernandez Chiquitas
Nicaragua • \$4.50 • Miscellaneous • Medium-Full
-  **93** Punch After Dinner
Honduras • \$5.89 • Churchill • Medium-Full
-  **90** Cain Daytona 550
Nicaragua • \$6.10 • Robusto • Medium-Full

MILDER CIGARS

- 88** León Jimenes No. 4
Dominican Republic • \$6.14 • Corona • Mild-Medium
- 88** Macanudo Café Duke of Windsor
Dominican Republic • \$9.19 • Figurado • Mild
- 88** Villiger Cuellar Connecticut Kreme Churchill
Dominican Republic • \$9.19 • Churchill • Mild-Medium
- 86** Ashton Aged Maduro No. 20
Dominican Republic • \$9.15 • Corona • Mild
- 86** La Barba Siempre 5 x 50
Dominican Republic • \$5.60 • Robusto • Mild-Medium

MEDIUM-BODIED CIGARS

- 92** Arturo Fuente Hemingway Classic
Dominican Republic • \$9.55 • Figurado • Medium
- 92** Oliva Serie V Melanio Churchill
Nicaragua • \$14.00 • Churchill • Medium
- 92** Romeo y Julieta 1875 Cedro Deluxe No. 2
Dominican Republic • \$6.72 • Corona • Medium
- 92** San Cristobal Revelation Triumph
Nicaragua • \$8.75 • Churchill • Medium
- 91** Brick House Churchill
Nicaragua • \$7.00 • Churchill • Medium

STRONGER SMOKES

- 92** Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Robusto
Dominican Republic • \$11.25 • Corona Gorda • Full
- 92** Pappy Van Winkle Tradition Churchill
Nicaragua • \$23.60 • Churchill • Medium-Full
- 92** Quai d'Orsay No. 54
Cuba • 14.00 EURO • Miscellaneous • Medium-Full
- 91** La Flor Dominicana Double Ligero Chisel
Dominican Republic • \$9.70 • Figurado • Full
- 90** La Aurora ADN Dominicano Robusto
Dominican Republic • \$7.25 • Robusto • Full

CIGAR AFICIONADO'S
100-POINT SCALE

Classic 95–100 • Outstanding 90–94 • Very good to excellent 80–89 • Average to good commercial quality 70–79
Don't waste your money 0–69 • Not available n/a • Note: all prices are manufacturers' suggested retail, before taxes.

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TOP 25
BEST CIGARS OF
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#10

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connoisseur's corner

A TASTING OF VINTAGE CIGARS



98 MONTECRISTO NO. 5 (1960)

Monte 5s are the lesser-known, smaller siblings of the ubiquitous Montecristo No. 4s. This well-aged example comes from a box of 25, which looks similar to modern-day boxes, but a closer look shows the far thicker lid, older Cuban tax seal and the absence of the "Habanos" sticker on the upper right hand corner of the box. The diminutive cigar, with its alluring chocolate-brown wrapper, fits nicely into your fingers and has an elegant look. The smoke is delicious, the draw easy and open from the first puff. While the little cigar is nearly 60 years old, it brims with flavors of licorice and sweet nutmeg. A wonderful cigar that delivers phenomenal flavor in a very small package.

—Marvin R. Shanken

JEFF HABAS



96 BOLIVAR ROYAL CORONA (2006)

This Bolivar is from the same vintage that was named Cigar of the Year. More than a decade later, it's still a rich smoke, though earth, coffee and leather are now in the background. Nuttiness has taken center stage, showing pistachio, almond and hazelnut, brought together by a creamy hint of nougat sweetness. We predicted that this cigar would get better with age. We were right. —Gregory Mottola



95 HOYO DE MONTERREY EPICURE NO. 1 (1991)

I took this slim, elegant smoke from a cabinet of 50, where it's been patiently sleeping for more than 25 years. It took greedily to the flame, and had a mellow flavor at first, with a light almond quality. Later, a wonderful note of honey and graham cracker emerged, sprinkled with a touch of earth on the finish. A pleasant, elegant and supremely balanced smoke.

—David Savona



94 ARTURO FUENTE AÑEJO S.S. SHARK NO. 77 (2007)

A dark, imposing figurado with a dark and toothy broadleaf wrapper. It was all leather and pepper in its youth, but 11 years of age have tempered its strength. It takes on a cocoa note at the start, then shows some lighter hints of that old leather quality. The finish has a touch of sweetness mixed in with the heavy wood. It's still strong, but not the unbridled powerhouse it was 10 years ago. —David Savona

CIGAR AFICIONADO'S

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2017 IN REVIEW

A detailed analysis of a
year's worth of cigar ratings

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA • DATA COMPILED BY DAVID CLOUGH

In this polarized, convoluted climate of conflicting political opinions, questionable reporting and, yes, fake news, it's always nice to have some solid stats to help you make an informed decision. That's where we come in. The most common question we're asked at CIGAR AFICIONADO is: Who makes the best cigar? The question itself is too subjective to have any definitive answer.

We'd much rather provide you with a year's worth of meaningful data and a detailed analysis to go beyond the numbers alone. These statistics shed light on where the best cigars are made, how much you as a consumer will need to spend to acquire these fine smokes and where the premium cigar business as a whole is headed. Here's a hint: it's going in the right direction. And, as you'll see, Nicaragua is becoming the shining star of the cigar universe.

CIGAR AFICIONADO rated 668 premium cigars in calendar year 2017, between cigars rated in this publication as well as those reviewed in *Cigar Insider*, our ratings-based newsletter that comes out twice a month. By breaking down that total and examining the scores we can not only show you which countries make the highest-scoring cigars, but we can itemize the highest-scoring brands, best value by country and even which cigar sizes turned in the best performance.

TOP SCORES OF 2017

95	Cohiba Espléndido	Cuba
94	Arturo Fuente Don Carlos Eye of the Shark	Dom. Rep.
94	Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Toro Natural	Nicaragua
94	Padrón Serie 1926 No. 2 Natural	Nicaragua
94	Romeo y Julieta Short Churchill	Cuba
93	Archetype Axis Mundi Toro	Nicaragua
93	Ashton Heritage Puro Sol Belicoso No. 2	Dom. Rep.
93	Ashton Symmetry Belicoso	Dom. Rep.
93	Joya Black Nocturno	Nicaragua
93	Macanudo Inspirado Orange Churchill	Honduras
93	My Father The Judge Grand Robusto	Nicaragua
93	New World Puro Especial Toro	Nicaragua
93	Padrón 6000 Maduro	Nicaragua
93	Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Imperial Natural	Nicaragua
93	Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Principe Natural	Nicaragua
93	Portagás Lusitania	Cuba
93	Piasencia Alma Fuerte Generación V	Nicaragua
93	Rocky Patel Vintage 2003 Cameroon Churchill	Honduras
93	Villiger La Flor de Yncán Robusto	Dom. Rep.
92	601 Red Label Habano Torpedo	Nicaragua
92	Alec Bradley Post Embargo Lancero	Honduras
92	Arturo Fuente Rosado Sun Grown Magnum R Vitola "Fifty-Eight"	Dom. Rep.
92	Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Belicoso No. 1	Dom. Rep.
92	Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Robusto	Dom. Rep.
92	Bolivar Belicoso Fino	Cuba
92	CAO Italia Clio	Honduras
92	Casa Fernandez Aganoras Leaf Torpedo	U.S.A.
92	Casa Magna Colorado Diadema	Nicaragua
92	CLE Prieto 50x5	Nicaragua
92	Diplomaticos No. 2	Cuba
92	E.P. Carrillo Dusk Solidos	Dom. Rep.
92	Eiroa The First 20 Years 54x6 Pensado	Honduras
92	Enclave Figurado	Nicaragua
92	Espinosa Habano No. 4	Nicaragua
92	Flor de Las Antillas Maduro Corona	Nicaragua
92	Guardian of the Farm Apollo Selección de Warped	Nicaragua
92	Joya de Nicaragua Cuatro Cinco Reserva Especial Torpedo	Nicaragua
92	Montecristo No. 2	Cuba
92	Montecristo No. 3	Cuba
92	Montecristo Artisan Series Batch 1 Toro	Dom. Rep.
92	Oliva Serie V Belicoso	Nicaragua
92	Oliva Serie V Torpedo	Nicaragua
92	Oliva Serie V Melanio Maduro Churchill	Nicaragua
92	Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Torpedo Natural	Nicaragua
92	Padrón Serie 1926 No. 35 Maduro	Nicaragua
92	Pappy Van Winkle Tradition Churchill	Nicaragua
92	Rafael Gonzalez 88 Exclusivo Asia Pacifico	Cuba
92	Ramon Alones Specialty Selected	Cuba
92	Regius Exclusivo U.S.A. Pressed Perfecto	Nicaragua
92	Rocky Patel Platinum Limited Edition Habano Toro	Nicaragua
92	Rocky Patel Specialty Edition Robusto	Nicaragua
92	Romeo by Romeo y Julieta Aging Room Small Batch F25 Cantar	Dom. Rep.
92	Romeo y Julieta Churchill	Cuba
92	Romeo y Julieta Rare 11 Years Old Toro	Honduras
92	Tatuaje Cabinet Noëlas	U.S.A.
92	Tatuaje La Verité La Verité 2013	Nicaragua
92	The Edge Maduro Missile	Honduras
92	Trinidad Topes Edición Limitada 2016	Cuba
92	Undercrown Sun Grown Flying Pig	Nicaragua
92	Undercrown Sun Grown Gordito	Nicaragua
92	Villiger La Flor de Yncán Torpedo	Dom. Rep.

Source: CIGAR AFICIONADO

Again, it all comes down to reliable data. Last year, every one of those 668 cigars were evaluated by our panel of cigar-smoking editors and underwent a blind tasting process. That means that each cigar was stripped of its label (or labels) and affixed with a generic, numbered white band. Before smoking, the editors know nothing about the cigar's country of origin, the blend of tobaccos contained inside or its price. This way, each cigar was taken at face value and judged solely on its appearance, performance and, most important of all, its taste. The entire process is managed by a full-time tasting coordinator who goes out and purchases the cigars from reputable retailers and high-end tobacconists. He then creates a code and passes out the cigars to each panelist for review. To be absolutely certain that the identity of each cigar remains unknown, the tasting coordinator is not a member of the tasting panel.

We can't stress enough the importance of a blind tasting process, and its one that we have employed throughout the entire history of this magazine, which dates back to 1992. Knowing the identity of the cigar can (and will) seriously prejudice the smoker—in both negative or positive ways—and affect the outcome of a score. Our method removes any possible preconceived notions and puts every cigar on a level playing field. It's the only way to give an honest, accurate and objective evaluation to a cigar.

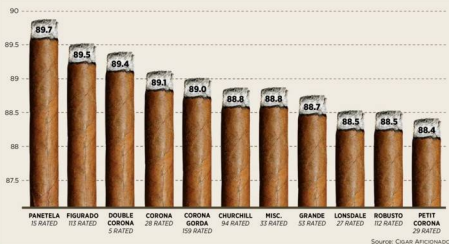
But back to the data. Of the 668 premium, handmade cigars we rated last year, 237 (or 36 percent) scored 90 points or higher on our 100-point scale. This speaks to the elevated level of the cigars being produced today by the members of the handmade cigar industry. The quality of tobacco is very high, the blends they are crafting are superb, made with intriguing tobacco varietals. This high level of quality could be seen in 2016 as well, when 39 percent of the 637 cigars rated that year scored 90 points or higher. The industry has responded to the high demands of cigar consumers, who are more discerning and sophisticated today than they ever have been.

Which brings us to an even more focused category—the elite circle. Out of the 237 cigars that scored 90 points or higher, 61 scored at least 92 points (see table, left), but only 19 cigars scored 93 points or higher. This choice-cut segment of 19 cigars represents the very best in cigarmaking for 2017.

Only four cigars were able to reach the lofty height of 94 points, two of which are Nicaraguan and both from the same producer—Padrón. The Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Toro Natural and the Padrón Serie 1926 No. 2 Natural are two of Padrón's super premium brands and serve as emblematic examples of how great Nicaraguan tobacco can be. The 1964 line is named after the year that the late founder José Orlando Padrón started his cigar company, while the Serie 1926 is named for the year of his birth. If the 1964 Anniversary line leans sweet, the 1926 tends to lean strong and spicy. Both are complex in their own way, yet maintain the rich qualities that exemplify Padrón's house style. Consistency has always been a hallmark of Padrón as well. The Serie 1926 No. 2 was named CIGAR AFICIONADO's No. 2 cigar of 2017.

Also scoring 94 points, the Cuban Romeo y Julieta Short Churchill was one of the best cigars to come out of Havana last year. Habanos S.A., Cuba's marketing and distribution arm, has made the Churchill a brand within a brand, as there are now four

AVERAGE SCORE BY SIZE



different sizes in the Romeo line that bear some variety of the Churchill name. However the one of distinction is the Short Churchill, which was also named the No. 19 cigar of 2017.

The Dominican Republic also produced an exceedingly fine 94-point cigar—the Arturo Fuente Don Carlos Eye of the Shark. It was the only Dominican cigar of 2017 to score 94 points and wound up as CIGAR AFICIONADO's Cigar of the Year. (A separate tasting is conducted for our Top 25, again with all the identifying cigar bands removed; those Top 25 taste test results are not included in this analysis.)

The Shark is exceedingly difficult to find, as are big Cuban Cohibas. The Cohiba Esplendido, a seven-inch-long, 47-ring-gauge smoke rolled in Havana, was the highest-scoring cigar in any regular CIGAR AFICIONADO/Cigar Insider taste test. Its 95-point score made it the only smoke to achieve “classic” status on our 100-point scale, however, the big Cohiba failed to make the cut in the Top 25 special tasting, showing an issue of consistency in this particular cigar.

Poor weather and diminished tobacco crops in recent years were reasons that cigar lovers have had a difficult time finding certain Cuban cigars, including the Esplendido. Rarer still have been Cohiba Behikes, which are so scarce in world markets that we didn't rate a single one in all of 2017.

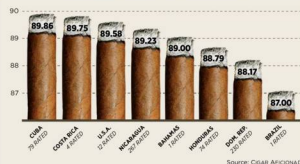
Nicaragua dominated the top scores of 2017. We rated 267 Nicaraguan cigars in 2017—more cigars than from any other country—and they scored an average of 89.23 points, second place among those countries with 10 or more cigar ratings in 2017. An impressive 41.2 percent of the Nicaraguan cigars we rated scored 90 points or higher—110 cigars, far more than any other country. Ten of the 19 cigars that scored 93 points or higher (53 percent) were rolled in Nicaragua, a testament to the growing infrastructure of the country and its position as a leading producer of high-quality premium cigars.

Nicaraguan companies such as Padrón, Oliva, My Father, Drew Estate, Rocky Patel and A.J. Fernandez, among others, continue to release great brands into the premium market. More Nicaraguan cigars on our Top 25 came from Nicaragua than from any other country. There were 12, including five in the Top 10 alone: the Padrón Serie 1926 No. 2, Oliva Serie V Belicoso, My Father The Judge, Guardian of the Farm Apollo Selección de Warped and the Placencia Alma Fuerte Generación V. Until now, the Placencia family has been known primarily as the largest grower of premium tobacco in Central America. Previous attempts to create a premium cigar had been lackluster at best, but the Placencias kept at it until they finally made a great cigar—naturally, with their own tobacco.

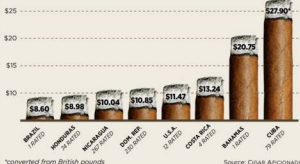
Nicaragua is not only impressing with its quality of cigars, it has also become one of the largest producers of premium cigars for the United States, nearly neck and neck with the Dominican Republic in terms of volume. Decades ago, Nicaragua wasn't even part of the conversation. At one point, even Jamaica, now a non-entity in the cigar business, overshadowed Nicaragua. Today, its fertile growing regions have attracted some of the best cigarmakers in the world and Nicaragua is in a truly enviable position.

Despite its crop problems and difficulties keeping humidors stocked with certain high-profile cigars, Cuba still scored the

AVERAGE SCORE BY COUNTRY



AVERAGE PRICE BY COUNTRY





rating of 89.58 points, just behind Cuba. We rated a dozen cigars rolled in the U.S. last year, and those high scores show the high quality of these smokes, such as the Tatuaje Cabinet Noellias (91 points, the only American cigar on the 2017 Top 25 list), Casa Fernandez Aganorsa Leaf Robusto (90 points) and the La Palina Collection Mr. Sam Corona (89 points). While the United States remains a smallish producer of handmade cigars, these ratings show how wonderful such cigars can be. Most are made in Miami or its surrounding areas.

We rated 74 Honduran cigars last year, and they scored an average of 88.79 points. Twenty-six of them (35.1 percent) scored 90 points or higher. Honduras did produce some top-scoring cigars in 2017, such as the Alec Bradley Tempus Natural Centuria, CLE Prieto and the Macanudo Inspirado Churchill, each of which appeared on CIGAR AFICIONADO's list of Top 25 Cigars for 2017.

CIGAR AFICIONADO rated 230 Dominican cigars in 2017, more cigars from any nation other than Nicaragua. Dominican cigars averaged 88.17 points—lowest among the major producers—with 52 of those cigars scoring 90 points or better, or 22.7 percent. The No. 1 cigar of 2017 is Dominican, as are many Dominican cigars that rated 93 points—Villiger's La Flor de Yncan, the Ashton Symmetry Belicoso and the Ashton Heritage Puro Sol Belicoso No. 2. Interestingly, more than half of the highest-scoring Dominican cigars from 2017 (there were 11 that rated 92 points or higher) were produced at one factory, Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia., the factory owned and operated by the Fuente family—makers of the Cigar of the Year.

The single Brazilian cigar we rated scored 87 points. While Brazil certainly produces lots of high-quality tobacco—both Cuban-seed and native varieties—it's lacking in cigar production.

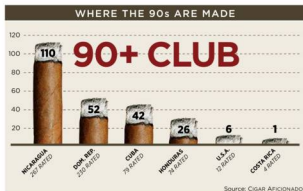
Regardless of country or tobacco blend, cigars are getting thicker and thicker. Churchills are larger, toros are heavier and 6 by 60s (also known as grandes) have moved from novelty to mainstream. Grandes—which we classify as any straight-sided cigar with a ring gauge of 60 or more—have become so prevalent we had to give them their own category in 2012. That being said, the grande size hasn't performed as well as others in our blind tastings. Grandes scored an average of 88.7 points.

The size format with the highest average rating last year was the panetela. We rated 15 of these slim smokes in 2017 and they turned in an average of 89.7 points. Panetelas are prized by connoisseurs for two reasons. Firstly, they represent the elegance of a bygone era. Secondly, the proportions alone ensure that the wrapper is the dominant flavor, not the blend. Panetelas are by no means top-sellers in cigar stores, but, judging by our numbers, will usually reward the smoker with a unique experience.

highest average of any country, 89.86. We rated 79 Cuban cigars and 42 of them—53.2 percent—scored 90 points or higher. Among them were the Partagás Lusitania, which scored 93 points and wound up as the No. 11 on cigar the Top 25 list. Like the Cohiba Esplendido, Lusitanias weren't the easiest of cigars to find at retail, especially in Cuba, due to the large size and the fact that large wrapper leaf wasn't as abundant as in previous years. The most consistent Cuban we rated was the Bolivar Belicoso Fino, which scored 92 points. While it didn't initially score as high as the Cohiba or Partagás in our regular tastings, it excelled in our Top 25 tasting, maintaining consistency at a high level through multiple rounds. In the end it was named No. 4 Cigar of the Year.

Costa Rica had the second-highest average score by country (89.75), but the small sample size—four cigars—makes it difficult to get that average much statistical importance. The same holds true for the single cigar we rated from the Bahamas, which scored 89 points.

Cigars rolled in the United States, however, had an average





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Chairman & Master Maker
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CIGARS BY THE NUMBERS



Size You Should Stop Ignoring: PANETELA

These skinny smokes are slow sellers, but they're the unsung heroes of the humidor, scoring an average 89.7 points.



King Of The 90s: NICARAGUA

An astounding 110 Nicaraguan cigars scored in the 90s last year, more than any other country. Ten scored 93 points or higher.

Bang For Your Buck: HONDURAS

Cigars from this Central American country average \$8.98 before taxes, \$1 less than Nicaraguan smokes and nearly \$2 cheaper than cigars from the Dominican Republic.

Pricey, But Worth It: AMERICAN SMOKES

Cigars rolled in the U.S. don't come cheap (\$11.47), but they post some of the highest average scores by country, 89.58 points.



Ghost In The Humidor: DOUBLE CORONA

A superb size that's dwindling in popularity. We rated only five in 2017.

Size To Skip: GRANDES

While immensely popular, 6-15-60 cigars are among the lowest-scoring smokes by size. Toros (aka corona gordas) are better choices for those who like their cigars fat. They average 1.3 points higher.

Figurados scored quite well, especially when you consider how many we rate. A figurado is a shaped cigar, so the category is immense, and includes torpedos, belicosos, double-tapered Salomones, perfectos, any shape with a curve, taper or point. We rated 113 figurados last year, and they averaged 89.5 points—0.2 points lower than panetelas. If you look at the Top 25 cigars of 2017, the top four are all figurados. This is not a coincidence. Cigarmakers tend to task only their top rollers with creating these fine cigar specimens. Everything from shape to proportion to the precise placement of fillers is carefully considered. Your chances of getting a superb figurado are more than just merely good—they're almost assured.

The double corona size is getting more and more difficult to find, as is clear by the small number we tested—a mere five samples. They averaged well at 89.4 points, but with numbers so low, the double corona is frightfully close to extinction. Coronas aren't doing much better. Though the average was 89.1 points, we're only looking at a sample size of 28 cigars for the entire year.

Corona gordas (also known as toros) are a different story. You'd be hard-pressed to find a cigar brand that doesn't have a corona gorda or toro size of some sort in its line. It remains very popular, and we smoked 159 of them last year, more than any other size and

24 percent of our total. Given the high number, their 89-point average is quite impressive.

Cigars in the Churchill and miscellaneous categories tied with averages of 88.8 points, while grandes fared a little worse at 88.7 points.

Two categories tied with an average of 88.5 points: lonsdales and robustos. It's no surprise that we rated only 27 lonsdales (another size that's fading), but robustos remain quite popular and the third-largest category at 112 cigars. The 29 petit coronas of 2017 averaged 88.4 points, only a hair behind. It's clear that thin is out and thick is in. The reason often cited for the popularity of thick cigars is almost universal: perceived value, ergo more tobacco for the dollar.

When it comes to value, you're most likely to get the best bang for your buck if you buy Honduran. The average price for a Honduran cigar is \$8.98, cheaper than any other country (save for Brazil, which only had one cigar rating in 2017). Honduras might not be as hot as Nicaragua right now, but if you're watching your wallet, it's the smartest way to get the most out of your dollar.

It's become a common cliché of the day that \$10 is the so-called "sweet spot" for premium cigars. In other words, it's the price-point that most cigar manufacturers aim for in the U.S., as most consumers are willing to pay in the \$10 range for a good cigar. Both Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic have hit that spot, or at least that range. Nicaraguan cigars average \$10.04. Dominican cigars skew slightly higher, at \$10.85.

If you're a patriotic American, your love of country is going to cost you a bit more. Labor is naturally higher in the United States than it is in Central America or the Caribbean, and our averages reflect this reality. Cigars made in the U.S., most of which are produced in Miami, average \$11.47. They're still less expensive than Costa Rica, with an average of \$13.24, and far behind the Bahamas at \$20.75, which really has only one major producer of premium cigars, Graycliff.

CIGAR AFICIONADO has historically reported Cuban cigar prices in British pounds, a market that is more expensive than most (Switzerland and Cuba, for example) and cheaper than others (namely Canada). With an average of \$27.90 per cigar (converted from British pounds), Cuban cigars are not exactly for the bargain hunter, yet retailers of Cuban cigars don't seem to have any trouble selling their stock. Underscoring this fact was the release of the Cohiba Talismán Edición Limitada for 2017. In the U.K. it retails for around £80, or about \$111. According to reports, first shipments of the cigar sold out almost immediately.

Amidst all this data, the predominant theme here is quality, and this shouldn't be too much of a shock. It's been said many times that premium cigars are enjoying a golden era right now. In this case, the cliché is correct and the numbers reflect this. Nicaragua is clearly on the rise. It dominated our yearly tasting in sheer numbers alone and shined quite brilliantly in the top scores of 2017. But the best news of all is that the finest cigars are not limited to one particular country or one particular price point. Once you put nationalistic pride and propaganda aside, the numbers make it clear that there is a great cigar for almost everyone. ♦

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FEBRUARY 20, 2018 • VOL. 21, NO. 4 • FROM THE PUBLISHER OF CIGAR AFICIONADO MAGAZINE

3 YEARS HERE TO ENJOY

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FEATURED CIGAR

LA AURORA RESERVA ESPECIAL 2008 BELICOSO
DOM. REP. • PRICE: \$27.00 • BODY: MEDIUM
For full rating, go page three



BEST CIGARS THIS ISSUE

La Aurora Reserva Especial 2008 Belicoso	Dom. Rep.	91
Four Kicks Maduro Corona Gorda	Dom. Rep.	90
Four Kicks Maduro Robusto Extra	Dom. Rep.	90
Four Kicks Maduro Sublime	Dom. Rep.	90
The Oscar Habano Robusto	Honduras	90
Trinidad La Trova	Cuba	90
Macanudo Inspirado White Churchill	Dom. Rep.	89



**A NIGHT OF 35+ CIGARS
THE BIG SMOKE MIAMI IS LESS THAN
A MONTH AWAY,** and the night will feature no fewer than 35 handrolled, premium cigars. Some of the biggest names in the cigar business will be on hand on Friday, March 16. For details and a list of cigars, see page 8.



CIGAR FESTIVALS KICK OFF IN D.R. AND CUBA
THE PROCIGAR FESTIVAL IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC BEGAN ON SUNDAY, and next week Cuba's 20th annual Habano Festival opens in Cuba. More than 1,000 cigar lovers from around the world will attend the Cuban Festival, and several hundred will travel to the Dominican Republic for ProCigar. Cigar Aficionado senior editor Gregory Mittle is in the Dominican Republic this week covering ProCigar, and senior contributing editor Gordon Mack will arrive in Havana next week to cover Cuba's festival. Follow them at www.cigaraficionado.com.

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CIGAR WATCH

FROM THE EDITORS OF CIGAR AFICIONADO

FEB. 27, 2018 | SIGN UP



FEATURED CIGAR

Regius Exclusivo U.S.A. Oscuro Especial Toro Extra (89 Points)

Oscuro Especial is one of three blends that make up the Regius Exclusivo U.S.A. series, which is made solely for the American market. The Oscuro Especial Toro Extra (8 1/2 inches by 56 ring gauge, \$13.00) is an intriguing dark with a near-black wrapper evocative of the dark chocolate notes it delivers to the palate.

Regius Cigar Ratings

Q&A: Ashli Kapores of Regius Cigars



New Cuban Cigars for 2018

The Romeo y Julieta Gran Churchill led the parade of new cigars announced by Habano S.A. at yesterday's inaugural press conference in Havana, kicking off the 20th annual Festival del Habano. Highlights also include the Corbin Robusto Reserva Cosecha 2014, two new Portagila Linea Maduro sizes, a Hoye de Montañero extension and the details for this year's Edición Limitada cigars.

Read Full Story

Stop: Havana's Cigar Scene

ProCigar Holds 11th Festival In Dominican Republic

Hundreds of enthusiasts took over Santiago last week for the annual ProCigar Festival, a celebration of Dominican cigars, tobacco culture and the industry as a whole. It's a series of day-and-night events filled with tobacco field trips, factory tours, dinners and late-night dancing.

Read Full Story

Stop: Visiting The Expanded Fuente Factory During ProCigar

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A Seat On Cuba's Official Tasting Panel

Joining Cuba's cigar experts to evaluate blends for Havana's future cigars BY GORDON MOTT



It's a job that any cigar aficionado would envy, tasting new tobacco blends that could become the next Cohiba, Montecristo or other fine Cuban cigar.

I couldn't believe what I had just heard. A Tobacco Research Institute official had just told me that Cuba's new blends are often reviewed by a highly selective panel of tasters from the top export factories and officials in the tobacco industry. "Really," I thought, "I've never heard of that panel!" Almost simultaneously I wondered, "Would they ever let me inside one of those meetings?"

I asked immediately if I could attend the panel's next gathering, explaining with more than a little hubris that if any outsider was qualified to taste cigars, I might be that person. The people sitting in the room looked at each other, and I detected at least one roll of the eyes. "Who do you think you're kidding?" they seemed to say. It made sense. Why would the Cubans let a foreign journalist inside the castle gates to sit in on a virtually secret panel with the extraordinary power to judge and approve new cigar blends? As well as anyone, I know that Habanos keeps its secrets about new cigars as close to the vest as the nuclear launch codes.

However, no one said no.

That was 2016. For the next year, I kept politely inquiring about the panel, which is called the Comisión Nacional de Degustación, officially translated as the National Tasting Commission. Or, in English shorthand, a tasting panel. I asked people in Cuba if they had heard of the panel. While several said yes, including one man who had been to one meeting, just as many had no firsthand knowledge of its existence, even those inside the cigar industry. According to the scant details I was able to gather, the panel meets eight to 10 times a year, and not only addresses new blends, but from time to time, will test a factory's adherence to a particular brand's flavor profile.

Then, out of the blue, I got an e-mail, inviting me to join the tasting panel's meeting on September 26, 2017. Between two hurricanes, and worries about the lingering damage from those storms, I almost canceled the trip. But on Tuesday the 26th I found myself sitting with more than 40 other people on the covered patio of the Four Ways Sheraton Hotel pool area in Havana. No restrictions. All on the record. I kept pinching

*This was not some randomly selected group of people who were pulled together.
Each of the tables had tasters whose cumulative experience often exceeded 50 years.*

myself as Luis Felipe Milanes, the director of quality control at Tabacuba, the tobacco growing arm of Cuba's cigar industry, explained that four cigars would be handed out, two different vitolas or sizes, with two different blends each.

"These cigars have been rolled within the past month," Milanes told the crowd as the first cigar was passed out, a Magico vitola, 4 1/2 inches by 52 ring. It had been rolled at El Laguito, the home factory for Cohiba, Cuba's most iconic brand, and came out of a big, paper-wrapped bundle bearing a numeric code on a simple white band.

I pick up the cigar. It looks and feels like a Cohiba, the brownish wrapper with just a tinge of red is smooth and oily. In front of me, I have a tasting sheet that bears no resemblance to the tasting sheets we use at CIGAR AFICIONADO. There are no points, and there are six categories used to rate the cigar: draw, aroma, flavor, strength, burn and general quality. Each category has seven sub-categories. For draw, the seven range from excessive to very insufficient. In aroma, flavor, burn and general quality, the descriptors are excellent, very good, good, acceptable, regular, bad and very bad. Strength ranges from very mild to very strong.

Let's be clear. This was not some randomly selected group of people who were pulled together for that meeting. My table included Oscar Ricote, the head of quality at Habanos S.A., and Baldomera Beker Rivas, a grizzled, longtime Habanos employee who is the head of the committee for special cigar projects. At some of the other tables were the former head of El Laguito, Arnaldo Ovalles, and the former head of the H. Upmann factory, Miguel Barzaga. Each of the factory tables had tasters whose cumulative experience often exceeded 50 years. A source told me that he had been a member of the panel for years, and it was always made up of real tobacco people who took this task seriously.

As the smoke flowed freely on the warm, humid Havana morning, I was in heaven. For the first half hour, we smoked the first of the two Magico blends. I judged it to have a firm draw, a wonderful aroma, good burn, very good flavor and slightly strong strength—overall a very good cigar. Milanes encouraged the crowd to move on to the second blend after 30 minutes. I found the second blend to be firm as well, but a better cigar than the first.

When the smoking ended after about an hour, the comments began. Tasters at each table stood and recited their impressions of the cigar. At one point, after a contrarian report on the strength, Milanes reminded everyone that all opinions were valuable and should be respected. Finally, after both blends had

been commented upon, Abdel Díaz, the roller from El Laguito who created the cigars for the commission's meeting, stood up and gave his own impressions, adding to a room full of chuckles "this is an excellent cigar."

There was a short break for a small sandwich and a cold soda. The panel's arbiters do not allow coffee, a real sacrifice for cigar-smoking, coffee-loving Cubans, because they believe it can alter tastes. Then it was time to go back for more testing.

The next two cigars were Sublimes (6 1/2 inches by 54 ring) rolled in the Partagás factory in Havana. Once again, each cigar was puffed for approximately 30 minutes of smoking time.

As the tasters stood to make their comments this time, they were asked about their backgrounds, and I got an idea of just how long these people had been working around cigars. Odelayne Paneque had been a taster for eight years, and a factory worker for 15 years. Barbaro Jova, a strapping well-built man, had been a taster for 16 years. Edith Sanchez, a Partagás employee, said she had been a taster for 22 years. Leonardo Agustín Alamo, another Partagás taster, summed up his Sublime by saying, "This is an elegant cigar and it is stable from beginning to end."

The tasters earn a spot at these tables by a monthly rating process that judges how good a taster they are. The factory "team" for the commission tastings can change from meeting to meeting based on the internal competition to judge who is the best. On this particular day, the majority were women.

Milanes ended the session with a hint at the results. There was a broad consensus for one of the Sublime blends—the one that was a bit milder than the other—and for the second of the two Magico blends, which was medium in strength. "In both cases today, you have chosen the blend that we are looking for in these brands," he said.

But he declined to tell the tasters—or this journalist—which blend was destined for which brand.

The chatter over lunch focused on what these cigars could be. Everyone agreed the Magico was almost certainly for Cohiba, because it had been made at El Laguito, and a good percentage of all Cohibas are made there. But the Sublime had people guessing, because the Partagás Factory makes a number of different brands. In the end, the consensus was that because the blend was relatively mild, it was destined for a Hoyo de Monterrey.

Habanos promised me they would reveal the details of each cigar after they are released in 2018. ♦



Abdel Díaz from Havana's El Laguito Factory, wearing the Cohiba colors, comments on a test blend.

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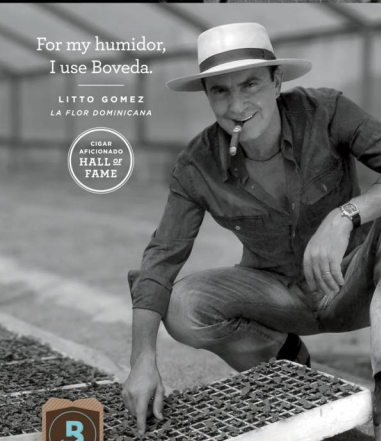
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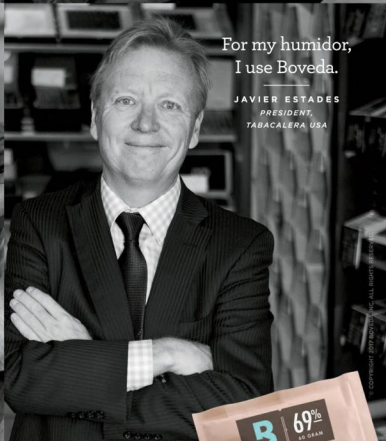
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Peter Bevacqua, CEO of the PGA; Rudolf W. Giuliani, former mayor of New York City; CIGAR AFICIONADO editor and publisher Marvin R. Shanken, and Eric Trump tee off at Old Palm Golf Club in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.



During an evening of delicious food, camaraderie and fine handrolled cigars, Evan Darnell and Aaron Roth celebrate 20 years of friendship while lighting up at The Red Meat Lover's Club of Seven Bridges in Delray Beach, Florida.



On their first annual guys' trip, Bryan Margendant, Brendon Remezas, Louis Richardson and Tommy Schulman sample the local fare by puffing on Cuban cigars and enjoying the atmosphere at the Saratoga Hotel in Havana.



The Ransom brothers sure know how to commemorate a birthday. From left, Butch, Mike and Ken sit back, relax and savor the taste of premium cigars while basking in the sunshine on Mike's birthday in Key West, Florida.



Mark and Matt Harris share a cigar moment with Randolph Churchill, the great grandson of iconic cigar aficionado Sir Winston Churchill, at an event celebrating the 75th anniversary of the *Queen Mary's* inaugural voyage.



Good friends ring in the new year in proper fashion: sipping libations, puffing on Cuban Cohibas and proudly hoisting a copy of CIGAR AFICIONADO's 25th Anniversary issue at the Squaw Valley Ski Resort in Olympic Valley, California.



In Cuba, you smoke when you dine. Paul Puglia smokes a Romeo alongside his wife Flo Waxman at Restaurante La Criolla in Havana.



Meredith Yozwiak celebrates her 21st birthday by lighting up a pair of OpusX cigars with her father Charles in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.



Groom Peter Andrisani rings in his wedding day with cigars alongside David Andrisani, William Wolf, Kurt Gargiulo, Thomas Gargiulo, Anthony Wolf and Brian Blum in Woodbury, New York.



Newlyweds Quincy Seale and Natalie Slessey enjoy excellent Cuban Cohiba cigars at the Dundas Castle in South Queensferry, Scotland.



Michael and Amy Park savor Rocky Patel's The Edge Habano cigars at their home on their wedding day in White Hall, Maryland.

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#13 Cigar of 2017 by
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On a recent trip to Greece, Costa Colias, John Hatzia, Chris Silitzis and Bobby Silitzis take time to relax and enjoy camaraderie over premium handmade cigars in the village of Agia Sotira.



Rich Spanwill, Tom Cargulia and Feroz Ali light up Ashton Symmetry and Fuente Fuente OpusX Angel's Share cigars after an exciting day of watching Formula One racing in Montreal, Canada.



First Lieutenant John Glesener and First Lieutenant Melissa Glesener of the United States Army savor Cuban cigars on their wedding day at the Diablo Country Club in Diablo, California.

WARNING: This product can expose you to chemicals including tobacco smoke, which is known to the State of California to cause cancer and birth defects or other reproductive harm. For more information go to www.P65Warnings.ca.gov.

WARNING: Smoking cigars causes lung cancer, heart disease, and emphysema, and may complicate pregnancy.



Brothers and fellow cigar enthusiasts Tim and Bill Stonich savor premium smokes crafted by Alec Bradley Cigars while partaking in a leisurely game of gin in Newport Beach, California.



David Lo teaches his friends about the pleasures of cigars by lighting up a round of Cuban Montecristos after enjoying a large meal in the dining room of his home in Taipei City, Taiwan.



Scott Ashley commemorates his wedding to Brittany Van Zanten by lighting up La Gloria Cubana Serie R Black cigars while surrounded by friends and family in St. Michaels, Maryland.



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Friends Jim Rene and Jeff Heyman cruise the British Isles in style by lighting up cigars aboard the sun-soaked deck of Celebrity Cruises' 'Celebrity Silhouette'.



Barry and Christopher White spend some quality father and son time over cold beers and Montecristo cigars at Bravery Brewing in Lancaster, California.



Cigar lovers and newlyweds Jeff and Jessica Reisner have the time of their lives celebrating their January wedding. They were married on the pier of the Hyatt Key West Resort and Spa in Key West, Florida, surrounded by 50 of their closest friends and family, and continued the celebration into the night with great cigars.



Bill Geyde's smoky birthday with Dave Crownden, Tim Campbell, Joe Calenda, Alan Latrelle, Dean Freeman and Peter Walter in Victoria, British Columbia.



Nothing complements a day of golf and good friends better than a fine cigar. Gary Bourquin and Marty Shearer light up on the links in Mesquite, Nevada.



Nate LaBarbera and Kyle, Darryl and David Whitcomb relax while lighting up a few premium cigars inside the Rocky Patel Lounge at Virgil Avenue Tobacconist in Buffalo, New York.



Mark Chapman, Jesse Nagy, Andy Kurncz and Karl Nagy enjoy breakfast Ybor City style with Arturo Fuente cigars and a café con leche at King Corona Cigars and Café in Ybor City, Florida.



Members of the Columbian Lodge of Freemasons in Boston, Massachusetts, light up cigars at the Aleppo Shriners "Smoker" in Wilmington, Massachusetts, to benefit Shriners Hospitals.

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Steve, center, and Rachel Moss, right, from Dana Point, California, with their fresh bundles of cigars purchased directly from a tobacco plantation in Cuba.



Lighting up cigars on safari, from left, Paul Thumsuden, Yufong Thumsuden and Steve Pernotto relax after a day in the Serengeti while visiting Tanzania, Africa.



On his wedding day, Frank Burnash puffs on cigars with Dan Frase, Tyler Sweers, Jeff Bretzke, Jason Jouban, Jim Desrocher and Jeff Sweers at The Inn at St. Johns in Plymouth, Michigan.



Markus Davids, Michael Brown and Brian Wong savor Cuban cigars after a day of diving in Cozumel, Mexico.



Hazem Ennabi, Dr. Hailtham Ennabi, Ralph Sozio and Zef Perleshi enjoy fine cigars inside Zef's wine cellar on his birthday in Scarsdale, New York.



Stepbrothers Steve Benjamin and James Rivard bond over a pair of excellent Hojo de Monterrey cigars while cruising in Alaska aboard the Grand Princess.

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1 FLYING FURNITURE—MOTOART

In an age of stand-up desks and hanging chairs, the next rage is furniture that once actually took to the air. MotoArt furniture and art design salvages parts from retired airplanes and fashions wings, cowlings, fuselages, engine parts and ejection seats into desks, tables, beds, chairs, couches, even bars. The materials come from a parade of aviation history, including Beechcraft, Boeing, DC 6s and B-52s. Everything is customizable and you can even start small with a luggage tag cut from the skin of a 727. motoart.com and planetags.com

2 WHERE'S MY UMBRELLA—WEATHERMAN

When it comes to umbrellas you either buy quality for long-lasting protection or you go cheap on the theory you'll lose it anyway. Meteorologist Rick Reichmuth didn't want to compromise and created a sturdy umbrella with Bluetooth technology to track it when it's mislaid. Made with glass fiber ribs and shoots, and Teflon fabric covering, the Weatherman resists winds up to 55 mph and sends weather alerts to your phone. Available as a collapsible (\$59) or stick umbrella (\$65). weathermanumbrella.com

3 INGENIOUS JEANS—34 HERITAGE

While high-fashion jeans complete any wardrobe, the choicest cuts of denim are normally intended for the slender, leaving larger men with pitifully few options. Founder Ardie Ulukaya realized this gap in men's clothing and created 34 Heritage, a line of refined jeans that won't discriminate against men with waistlines exceeding 32 inches. Every pair is comfortable and dignified, fitting at the waist without frump and breaking beautifully at the ankles. Finishes range from classic blues and indigos to more ambitious, creative color palettes, all imparting the buttery feel of cashmere or wool. 34heritage.com

4 AUGMENTED PAPER—MONTBLANC

Conundrum: You want to join the digital age and take advantage of its many choices in communicating your thoughts, but you're still enamored with the time-tested tradition of putting pen to paper. Solution: Montblanc, maker of high-quality writing instruments, has developed Augmented Paper, a notebook in which you write, sketch or draw with a Montblanc StarWalker pen onto actual paper, while a digitizer in the leather envelope transfers your scrawling to your mobile device, turning your handwriting into print text. montblanc.com

5 BUFFING UP—BELLECORE BABYBELLE

It's hard to get buff when your muscles rebel with aches and pains after every workout. Professionals get regular massages. You can massage away the stress with Bellecore's babyBelle body buffer, a handheld device that uses random orbital oscillation to facilitate blood and lymphatic flow and speed up muscle recovery. It prevents delayed onset muscle soreness by flushing lactic acid build up. The babyBelle (\$149) also helps for trigger point release, tendonitis and plantar fasciitis. bellecore.com

6 WORLD CUP CLEATS—PANTOFOLA D'ORO

Just in time for this year's World Cup tournament, Pantofola d'Oro, maker of soccer footwear, has opened a pop-up shop in New York's SoHo district, offering its namesake “golden slipper” cleat. What's that? Not expecting to play in the global sporting event? You can still choose from a selection of Italian-made athletic and casual footwear in ultrasoft leather. The signature Pantofola d'Oro golden slipper is also offered as a personalized shoe in a range of colors and leathers. pantofoladoro.com

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